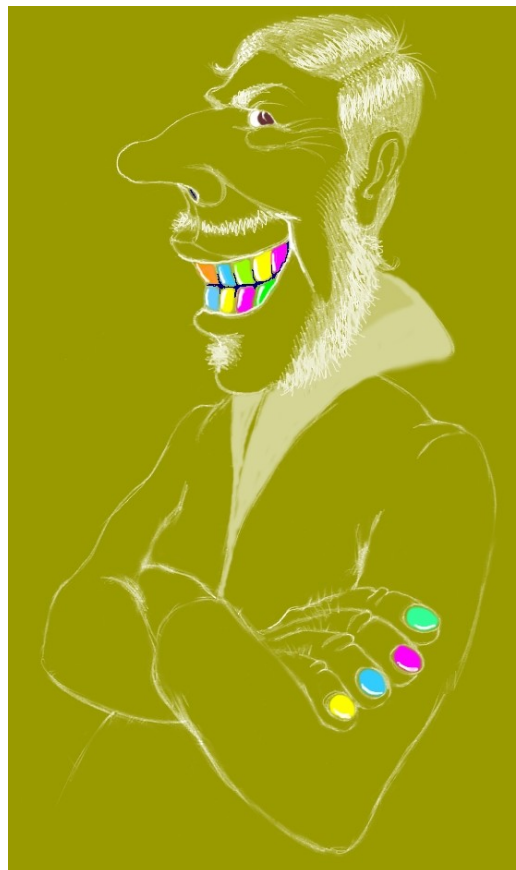


THE ILLUSTRATOR'S FOREWORD

The following manuscript was delivered by FedEx to my door in May 2006. Included was a note from the author, asking me to illustrate it for him. The note was signed 'Uncle Pete', and the author claimed to be a former boyfriend of my grandmother. He didn't specify which one, but stated that he used to dangle me on his knee when I was a mere nipper. As most people, I had two grannies, and one of them did answer to the name of Julia.

Well, I provided the illustrations in a couple of weeks but never heard from 'Uncle Pete' again. Since my cleaning lady had accidentally thrown away the package (yes, I know), I did not have the return address and was at a loss what to do next. A year passed, and I decided to publish the manuscript myself. I figured the author must have been quite old (Gran Julie died in 1989 at the age of 76), and must have kicked the bucket shortly after sending me his work. Or he might have had Alzheimer's and completely forgotten about the whole thing. Anyways, Uncle Pete, if you are still alive, please contact me ASAP. I'd be only too happy to share the royalties with you.



THE AMAZING JOURNEY BEGINS

We must have eaten something – or drunk – because we found ourselves in some kind of parallel reality, which was quite identical to the reality we had previously called home.

It was filled with familiar characters: friendly giants, pickpocketing fairies, lascivious mermaids, honest lawyers, hardworking royalty, atheistic dogs, gracious mothers-in-law, trustworthy politicians, Canadian Armed Forces, that kind of stuff.

“Same old, same old,” muttered Julie. “Let’s get out of here.”

“But wait,” said I. “Maybe we can find Ding-a-Madonga here.”

“I doubt it,” she yawned.

Little did she know that what began as a common case of food poisoning turned into the most mind-boggling journey of self-discovery since *Alice in Neverland*.

GOD FOR A DAY

His name was Quiteaslob. It became apparent from the moment he said:

“Hi there! My name is Quiteaslob.”

“I’m Peter,” I said apprehensively.

“And I’m Julie,” Julie curtseyed.

“Your names don’t matter. You realize, of course, that you are mere figments of my imagination. I’ve just eaten a mushroom. I always see little people after eating those mushrooms.”

“I’ve always suspected were the figments of somebody’s imagination,” I whispered to Julie. “Remember, last September I told you: Julie, I feel like a figment of someone’s imagination? Remember? But I never thought that that someone would be as big as that.”

“It freaks me out,” Julie whispered back. “I thought we were real.”

Quiteaslob intervened: “It’s just as well. I’m a figment of an imagination myself. God’s imagination, that is. Every time He eats some mushrooms, I come into existence”.

“That’s nice,” I grumbled. “So we turn out to be but second degree figments of imagination.”

“Don’t we have, like, our own god, or something?” That was Julie’s question for Quiteaslob.

“Beats me,” he replied. “Do you have your prayers answered?”

“No, never,” we conceded.

“Then you probably don’t have one. ‘Cause I always get mine answered. The same day.”

“That sucks!”

“You should get yourself a god. No, I’m serious. Comes in handy, y’know. All right, all right, don’t fret. I’ll be your god for a day. What do you want?”

“Well...”



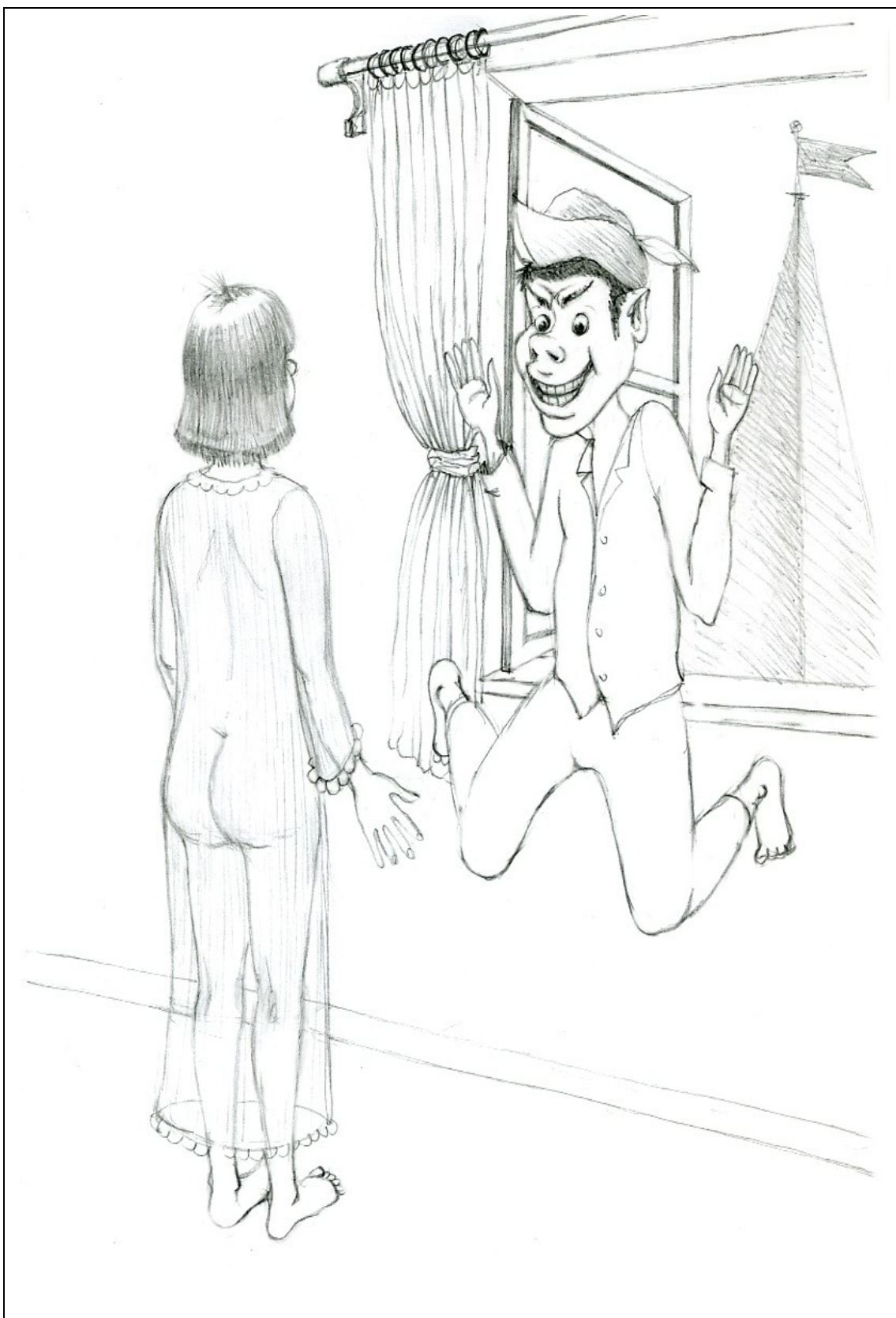
NEVERLAND

That was definitely the Neverland. There were a lot of pixies around, and none of them had any clothes on.

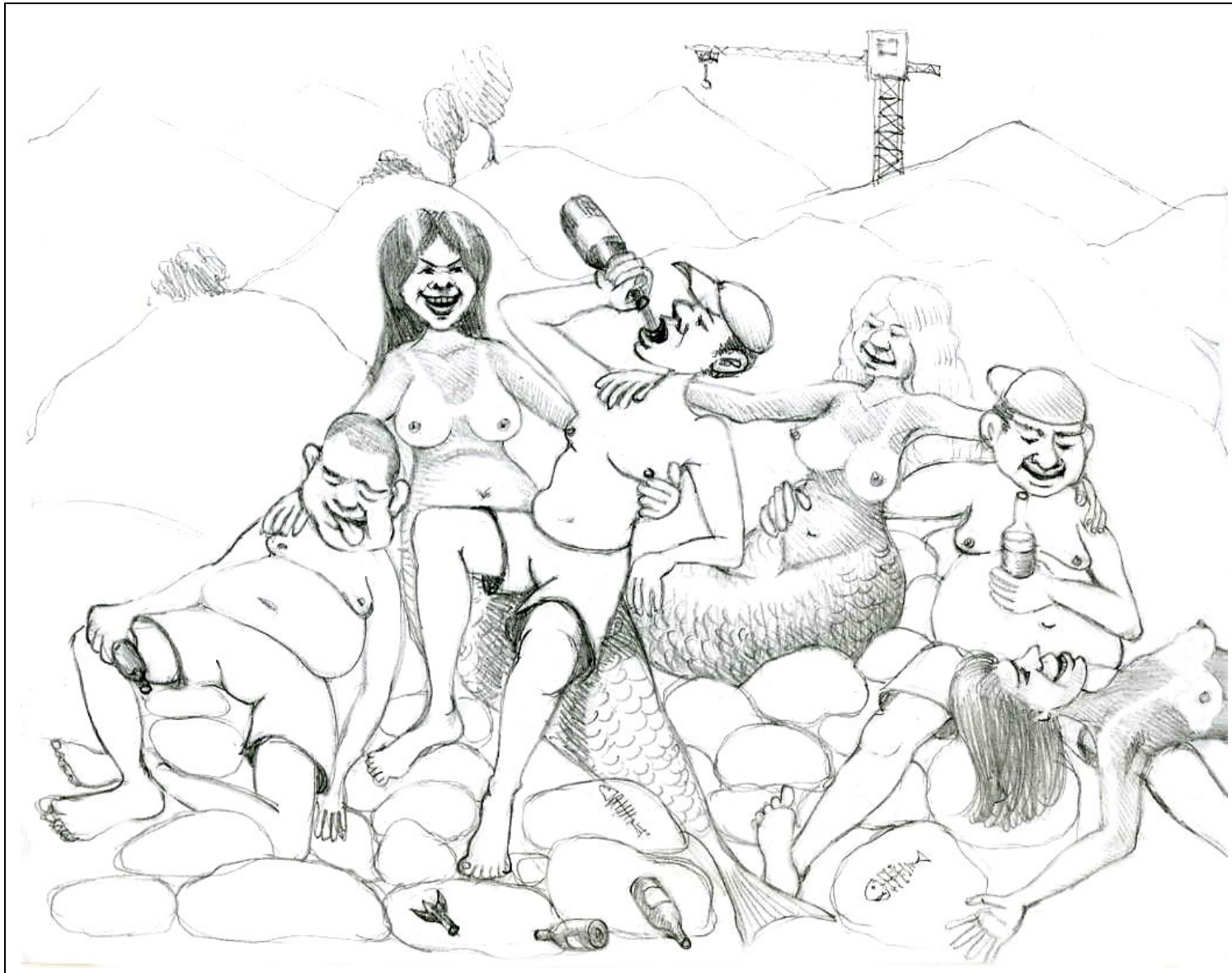
“For the last time, where’s the freaking Peter Pan?” demanded Captain Hook in a low raspy voice. Tinker Bell just stared at her toes, pretending to be dumb. The Captain had a habit of using adult-oriented language, and his breath could be used as tear gas. As if that wasn’t enough, he had a way of slamming his huge hairy fist on the wooden table. Tinker Bell did not know for how long she would be able to hold it off. She was bursting for a pee.



It was quite a shock for Peter when he realized that Wendy was greeting him in a completely transparent nightgown. I mean, he was trying to stay a kid as long as possible, but Wendy kept on introducing that sticky carnal aspect into their relationship. The last thing he wanted was to become like their parents, boring sex-obsessed citizens prone to alcohol abuse and depravity.



Back in Neverland, the Lost Boys were partying with the mermaids. Peter had long suspected that while he was away the guys indulged in low and unforgivable behaviour. The Tequila stench and lipstick smudges were the telltale signs. But he kept postponing that important conversation he often had with them in his head. “Since you guys never had any proper mothers, it’s only natural for you to be attracted to the female species, because on the subliminal level you are looking for a mum substitute. That’s the root of the libido, chaps, something you are too young to experience yet, and something that you’d want to give a miss if you had any brains. But I’m warning you – those bitches will break your little hearts, suck your vital energy and leave you in shambles. The whole notion of a kind and loving mother is a myth, just like the Loch Ness monster or the Phantom of the Opera, for instance...”



MAJOR SMUTT

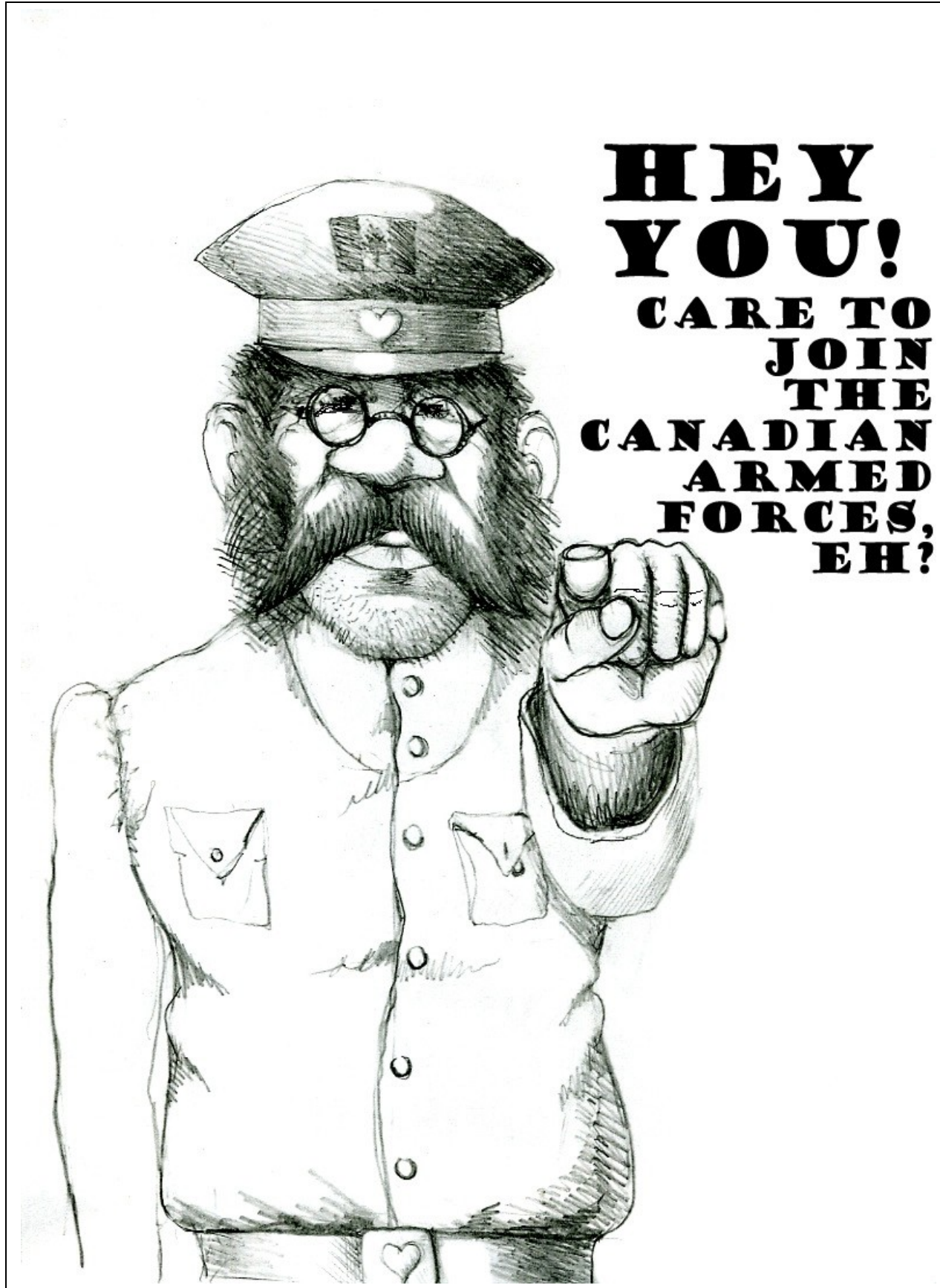
“The notion may be false, but it sure makes the world go ‘round. Care to join the Canadian Armed Forces, eh?” asked a creaky voice behind me, and I instantly knew it was Major Smutt.

I never really liked Major Smutt. But for some bizarre reason he wanted me in the Canadian Army.

“You’ve got a really warped sense of humour, man,” he used to say to me.

“But I’m 78, Major. Look at me. I’m nearly dead.”

“Not to worry. We’ve got great benefits for nearly dead here. And if you ever decide to finally die, the benefits are to increase even further.”



So he gave my phone number to some of his army buddies, and they kept on bugging me with their recruitment pitches. Colonel Kickinbotham rang a few times to inform me that the Canadian Army was where all the nicest people ended up. That was a clever approach – I've always thought of myself as a nice person.

**Canadian Army -
Where All the Nicest
People**

**END
UP...**



Then some lady rang and said that the Canadian Army was the place where only the bravest were allowed to have fun. Well, I've always considered myself rather fearless, intrepid even.

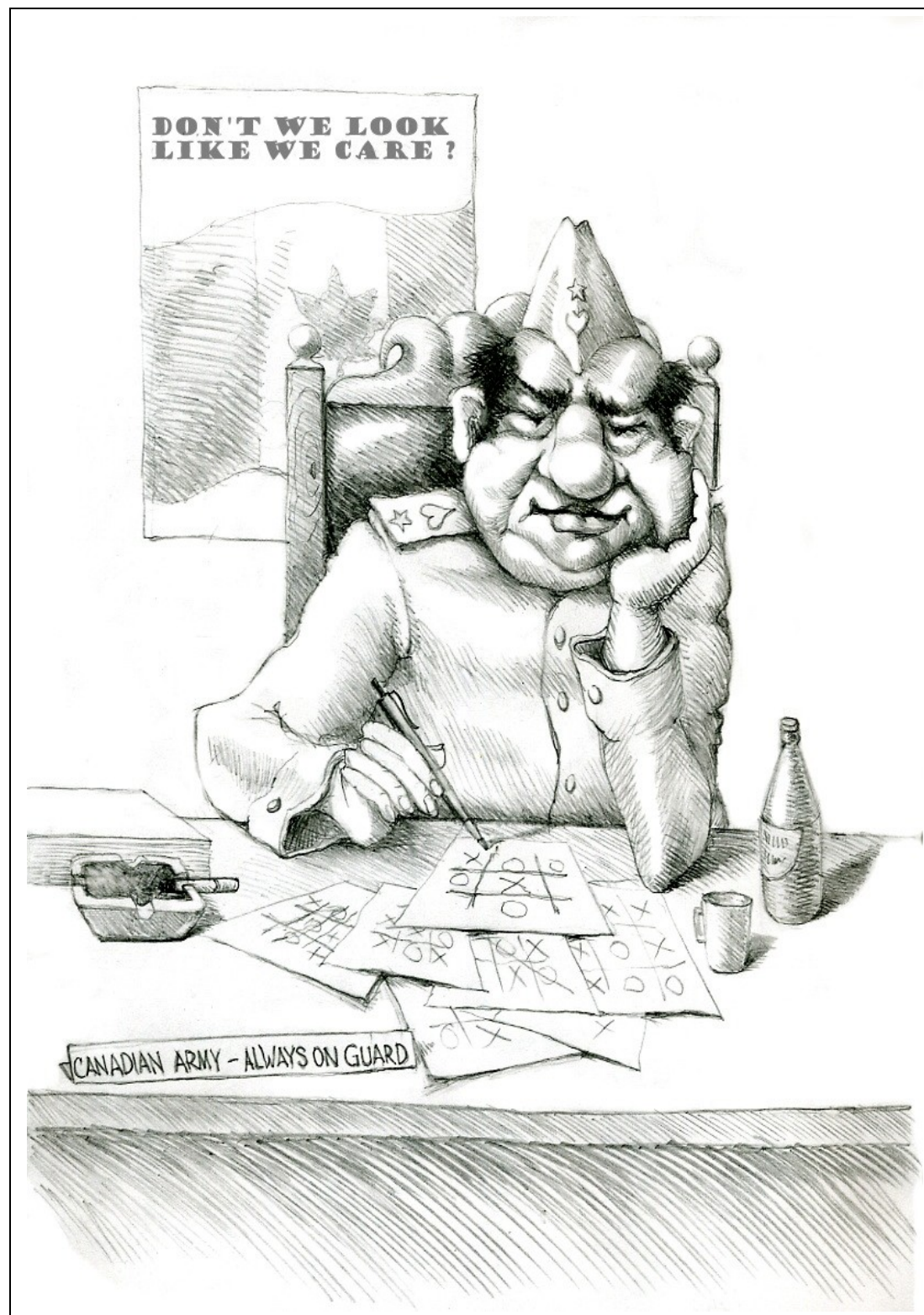


**CANADIAN
ARMY -**

**WHERE ONLY
THE BRAVEST ARE ALLOWED
TO HAVE FUN**

The commander-in-chief himself, General McMuck left a message on my answering machine. He was a man of few words. In fact, he was a man of no words at all. He just grunted and hung up. It's people like this who make the Canadian Army what it is. Whatever it is.

It all sounded very tempting. I promised them I would consider their offer.



THE CHICKEN TRIANGLE

No matter what they were saying about him, Major Smutt was a chicken. He proved it once again today when I saw him sitting on the bench with some... oh, no, that was my Julie! She also was sort of a chicken, but I could tell her by her legs. I could recognize those legs anywhere, even if they belonged to a hippo.



So the dirty old Major was embracing my true love! Despite being a chicken as well, I immediately challenged him to a duel. We were to fight over a woman – how banal! How pathetic! And how dangerous! Did you know that two prominent Russian poets of the 19th century, Alexander Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov, were actually killed at duels over some chicks? I totally agree with you – they were not very good poets, but that’s not the point. I was relieved to realize that we were to shoot each other with toy guns. I mean, Julie is a nice chick, and all that, but two adult chickens seriously putting their lives at risk over a female – any female – did not seem like a good idea to me. The only problem was that toy gun duels are terribly illegal in Canada, so we had to do it under cover of the night.



I pointed my gun at Major Smutt, ready to shoot, but at the last moment he lost his nerve and, muttering something about a previous engagement he had completely forgotten about, disappeared down a rabbit hole. Chickened out, you see. I must say I was disappointed. I was looking forward to a good fight. Julie was excited, though.

“You have won me, Peter,” she exclaimed, kissing my mouth. “Now let’s get married!”

“But married people never go to heaven, my love.” I was clearly looking for an escape route.

“Who cares about heaven!”

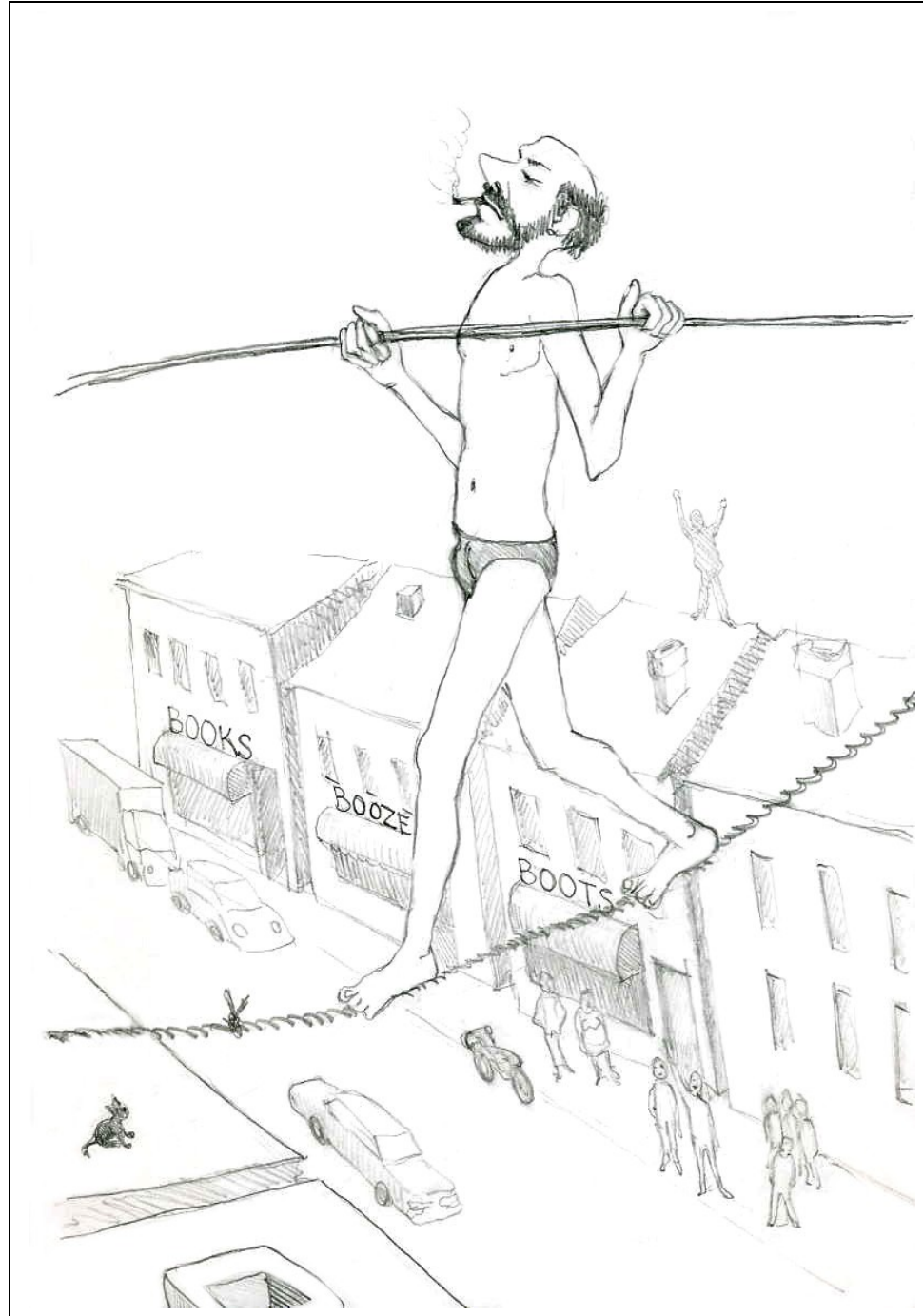
HEAVEN CAN WAIT!



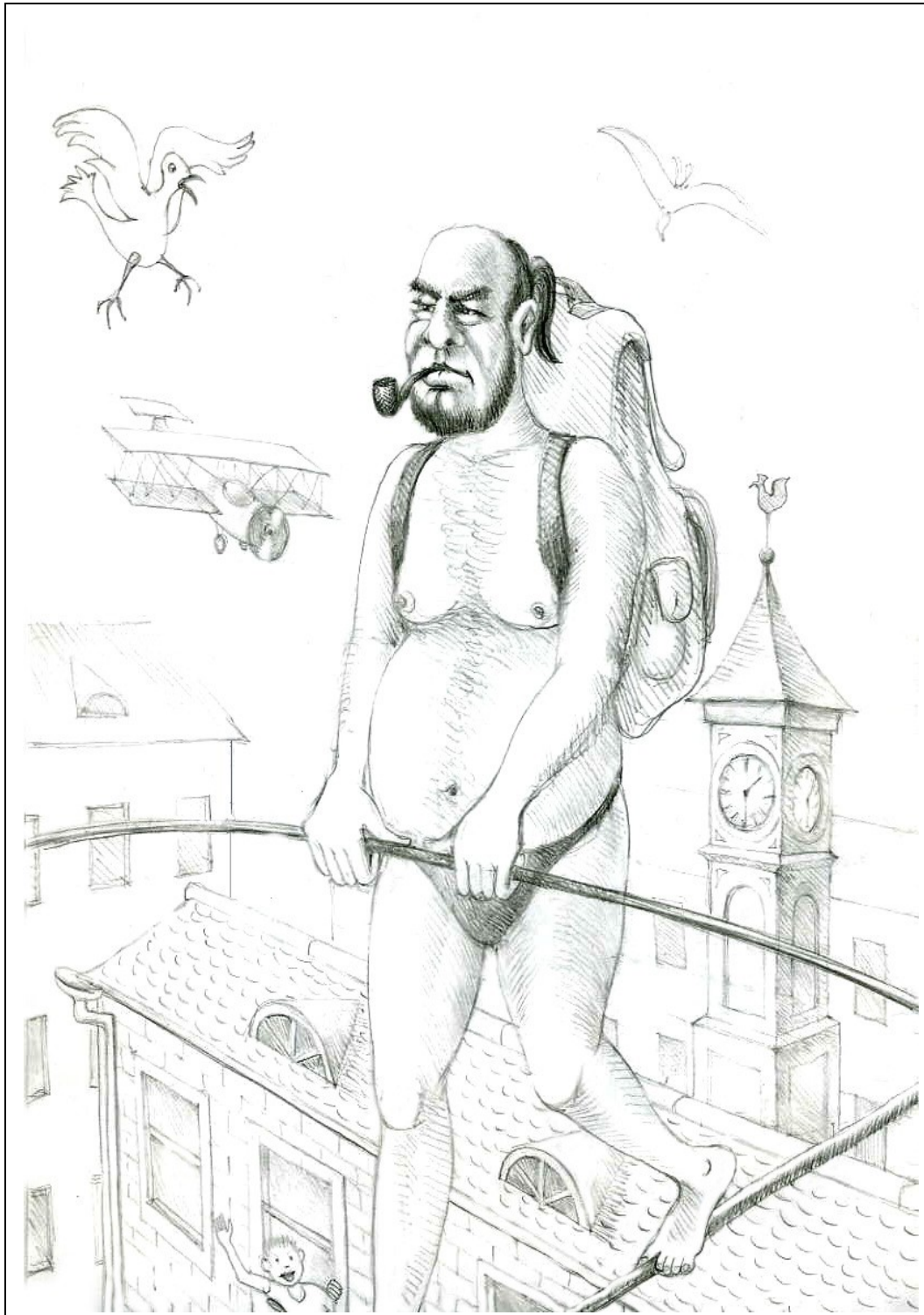
Julie & I

She looked really determined. I felt that our relationship was entering a new phase. I tried to remember how it all started. How we first met, and all that. Oh yes, it was back in my tightrope-walking days.

I was walking a tightrope one day, I think it was Cambridge or something, when I noticed a gorgeous young woman walking another tightrope not five miles away from me. I nearly fell off my rope. To say that she was pretty was like saying that falling off a tightrope can be painful. I was transfixed by her beauty – she looked awesome in her pink underwear – not too fat or too skinny – just right.



It was love at first sight for me. But she did not notice me then – she only had eyes for that fat bastard. His name was Dominic, and he was a snob, a slob and a bit of a s.o.b. But enough about him – he met his end in the way that was fitting for him. One July afternoon he was snatched by a Sopwith Camel and was never heard from again. One has to watch out for those Sopwith Camels – sometimes they kidnap people without any apparent reason.



Oh, wait a minute! I have a feeling somebody's tugging at my wallet. Not Trixie again!

TRIXIE

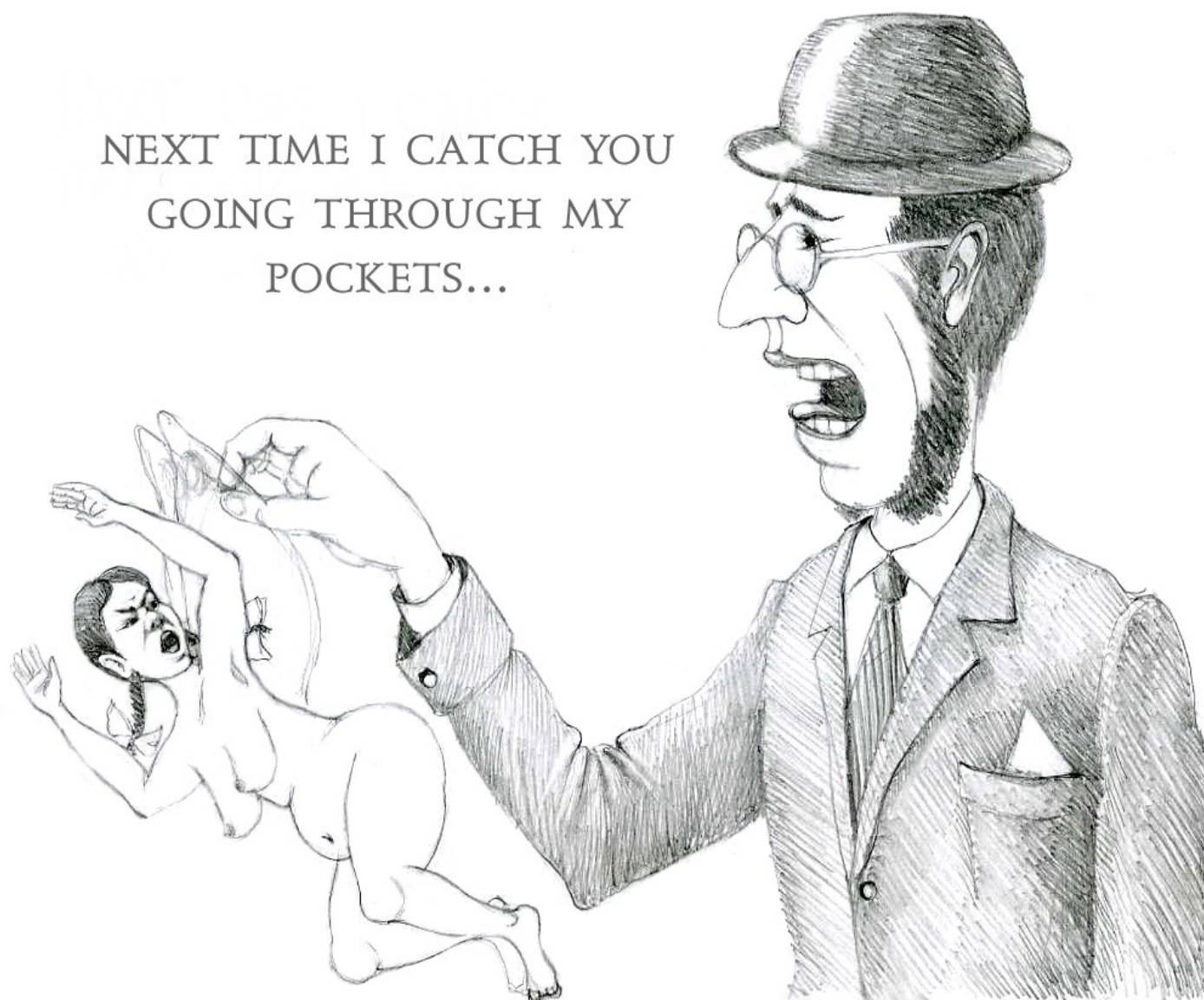
I used to like pixies. I would often let them turn my kisser into a playground. They danced in the air and sang something like:

Pretty faces, sordid lies,
Poisoned twinkleberry pies.
Speeding tickets make no sense
When you drive an ambulance.
Parking tickets you don't get
When you fly a jumbo jet.
Sober Russians have some fun.
Drunken Frenchmen having none.
[or is it 'have a nun', I'm not sure]
Shove it in and pull it out.
Tragic stuff to sing about.

Rocket science it is not,
You can see when guy is hot.
Horny midgets are so cute.
Even when they're deaf and mute.

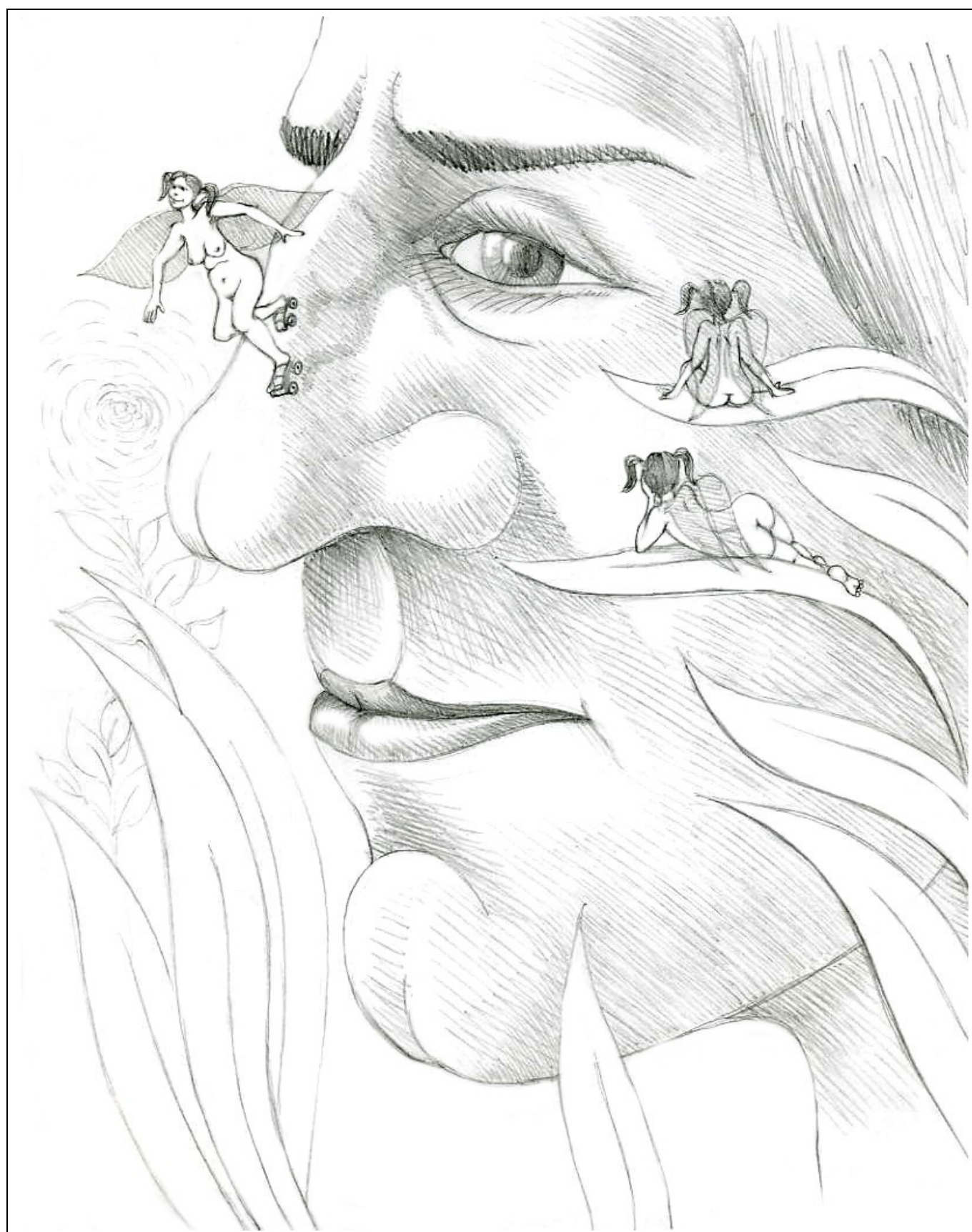
And some other rubbish like that.

NEXT TIME I CATCH YOU
GOING THROUGH MY
POCKETS...

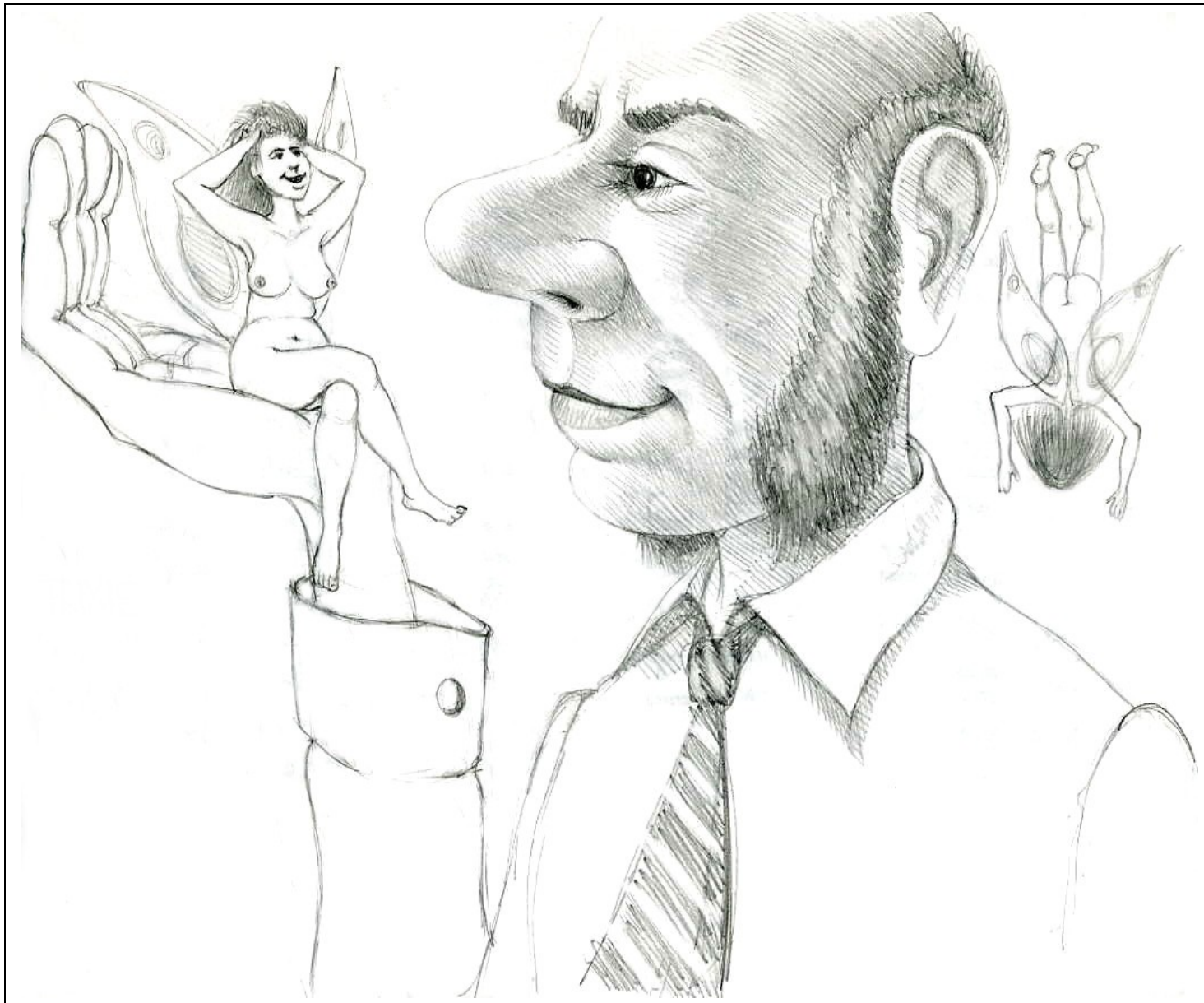


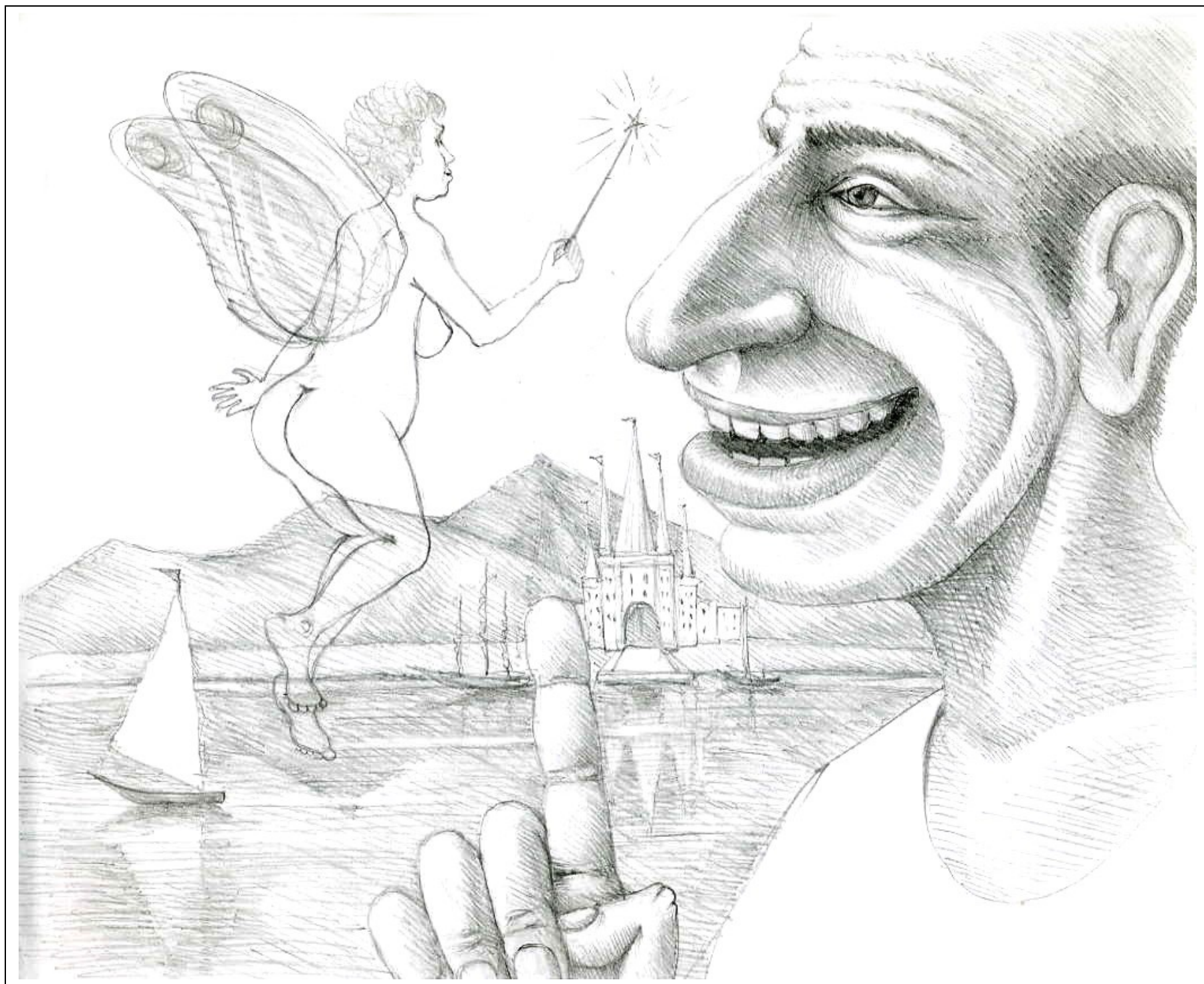
Like I said, I used to like pixies. I even befriended one of them. Her name was Cutebutdumb, but I used to call her Trixie. She used to bore me to death with her hard luck stories. She lived in a trailer park, and her Dad was always drunk, unable to fly straight, beating up her Mom, herself and her sister. Sometimes he would even beat up himself. A lot of bottled-up anger and frustration he had, her dad did. As a kid he was beaten up by his own father, that's why. One day he disappeared altogether. People were saying they saw him fly right into a telegraph pole at the corner of Maple and Church.

After that Trixie's life got much better. She, her Mom and her sister were really close. They shared everything, even boyfriends. Especially boyfriends. Sometimes they would even share the same toothbrush.



When I was a kid, I had a fairy godmother. She used to turn me into a frog every Christmas. All the girls in our village would dance around me and sing ribald songs. Then the one who fancied me would kiss me, turn me into a man again and become my girlfriend for a year, until the next Christmas. One year our blacksmith, the One-Eyed Pettigrew, stumbled upon us while drunk and kissed me. He thought it would be a *larf*. It wasn't. He automatically became my girlfriend. I don't like to dwell on that particular year. I just don't.





THE LOUVRE

But I digress. The second time Julie and I met, this time for real, was when I was a statue at the Louvre, and she was one of those humongous women on the painting, Reubens or Ingres was it, I can't recall. I used to stare at her across the room, and although I was just a bust, she seemed to acknowledge my presence. There was about five of them in the picture, all buttock-naked, but somehow I cared only about her. Her body sparkled and shone, especially at night, when the lights were out. To say she was fleshy is like saying that Renoir was a decent artist. She never tried to hide her assets – allowed me to savour all her majestic beauty. Always glancing at me suggestively, giggling and whispering something to her girlfriends. They were in a bathhouse, or something, and I could smell their slippery bodies across the room.

We were comparing you to that Apollo guy in the corner, trying to guess which one of you would be better, you know, girls' talk. Edith and Huguette naturally were betting on the Big Banana. Louise and Marie didn't care about men. But I fancied you more than him, I don't know why - you didn't even have a torso. I guess it was something subliminal. As a child, I used to like climbing up the pole at the school playground...

You had such a beautifully painted belly. When I imagined touching it, I could feel my paper melt.

Paper? What paper?

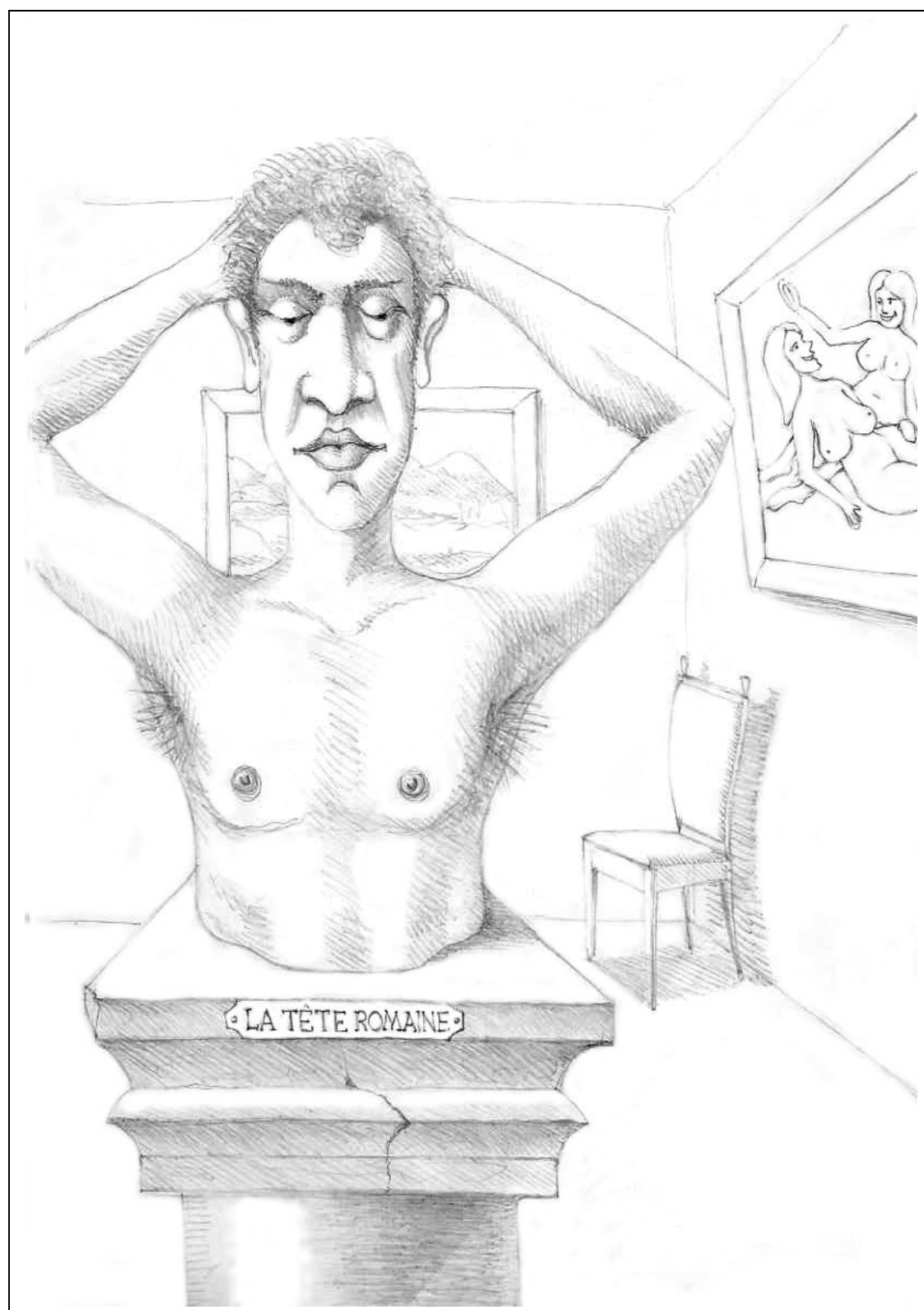
I mean, marble. Oh, all right, I've got a confession to make. I... I was a fake.

What?

It's not easy, but I guess it's time to let it out. The original me had been stolen from the Louvre probably before you were even painted. He was a Roman statue, you know. The robbers put in its place the papier-mâché replica, which was yours truly. The French never noticed, you know how they are. I stood there for more than a century, until in 1968 a rebellious student leaned on me, and I fell and smashed into a diddly-squat. You had been moved to another room by then.

Oh, no, I've been lusting after a papier-mâché phoney! Woe me! I feel terrible - betrayed and humiliated!

Ah, whatever. Let's move on, shall we?

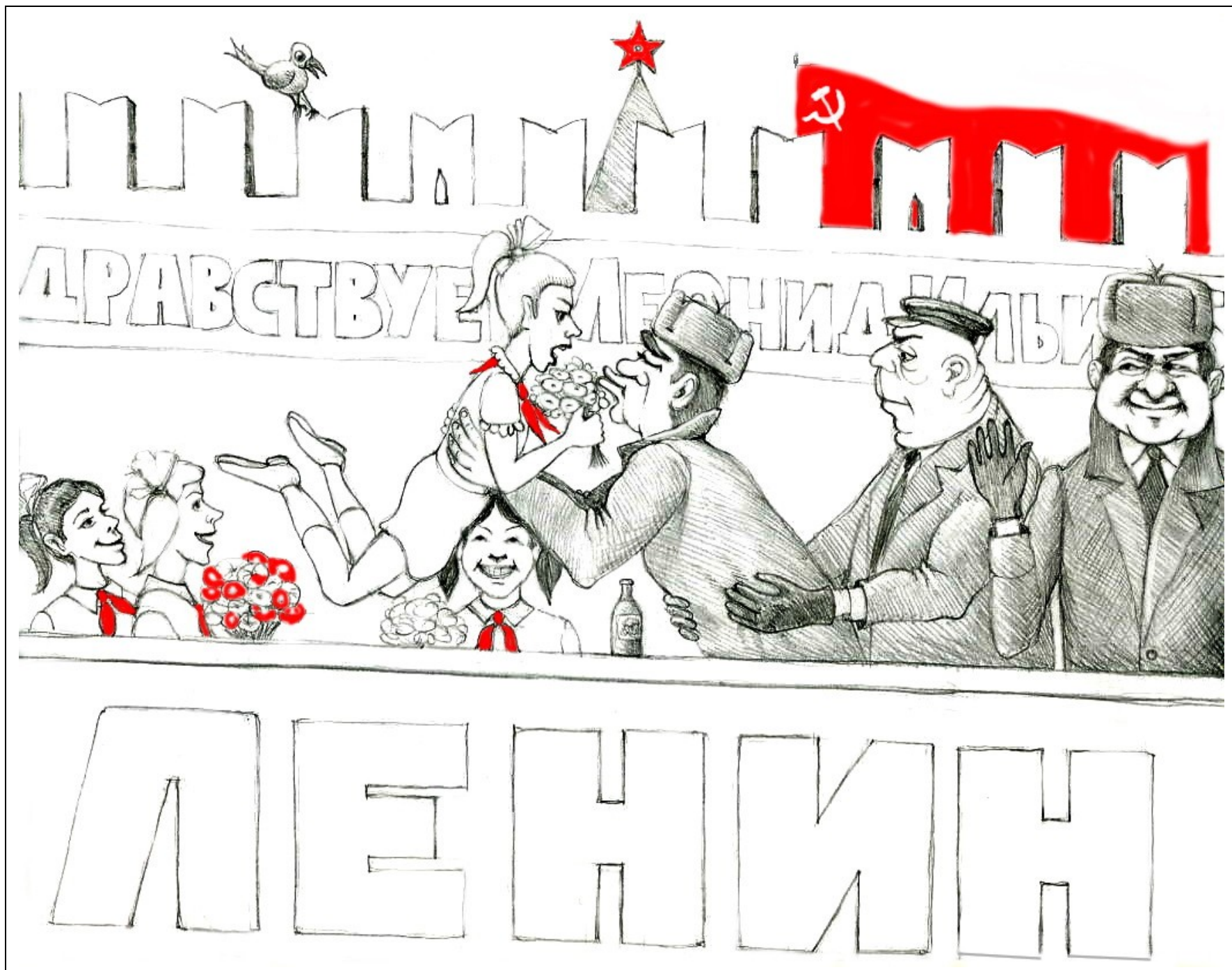


THE RED SQUARE KISS

If memory serves, our first kiss occurred much later, in 1978, when I was Leonid Brezhnev and you were a schoolgirl who presented me with flowers. It was some holiday, the 1st of May or something, and I was standing on the top of Lenin's tomb looking down and waving to the hordes of happy Soviet citizens merrily marching below across the Red Square, balloons in their hands. Or was it Tiannanmen Square? Either one or the other. Anyways, you handed me the flowers, and I lifted you up and kissed you on the cheek.

Yeah right, on the cheek, you actually attempted to slip your whole tongue in my innocent mouth, you dirty old man. If it wasn't for comrade Kosygyn, you'd stick it right in.

Yeah, he was a jealous son of a bitch, wasn't he, old comrade Kosygyn. Still owes me a tenner.



SAD PARTINGS

“Can a dog join the Canadian Army?” I once asked Major Smutt.

“Dogs, cats, chickens, you name it. Badgers, raccoons, squirrels, beavers. Especially the beavers...”

“OK, OK, I was just wondering if I could enlist our Bingo. He’s a Great Dane. He’s alright. I’m sure he’ll be delighted”.

There’s going to be a sad parting, though. I am fond of sad partings. Have I told you about the sad partings? Once Julie and I had a very sad parting. That was when I finally joined the Canadian Army and was sent to Afghanistan on a peacekeeping mission. Our parting was so sad that I actually started having some salty liquid drip from my eyes. It can hardly get any sadder than that. The worst thing was that when we came to Afghanistan the next day, we found that it was all peace and quiet there, and they said we could go back home right away. I’ll never forget Julie’s face when she opened the door. She must have realized that we had just wasted a very sad parting.



THE GOOD GOD AND THE BAD GOD

Once we bumped into a Wandering Monk, and he told us the following story. Not that we asked him to.

“Don’t worry. I’ve got everything under control,” said the Good God.

“You know what? I don’t really care,” said the Bad God.

“Well, you should,” said the Good God.

“Why should I?” grunted the Bad God.

“Because a good god is a caring god.”

“Well, I’m not a good god, then. I must be a bad god”.

“So what? You can change. I was a bad god once. And now look at me.”

The Bad God looked at the Good God. He did not look bad at all.

“So how did you become the good god? Went through a god rehabilitation program, or something?”

“Don’t be a smartass. I just stopped *doing*.”

“Oh, no, don’t give me all this Castaneda crap, please. I hate that bullshit.”

“Hey, by the way, watch for that truck!”

“Why should I watch for that truck? You just told me to stop *doing*. Ouch!”

“Good god!” exclaimed the Good God.

And so it came to pass that there was only the Good God in this world.

“Mr. Wandering Monk, sir, if you’re saying that there were the Good God and the Bad God once, doesn’t it follow that there also must have been a good Jesus and a bad Jesus?”

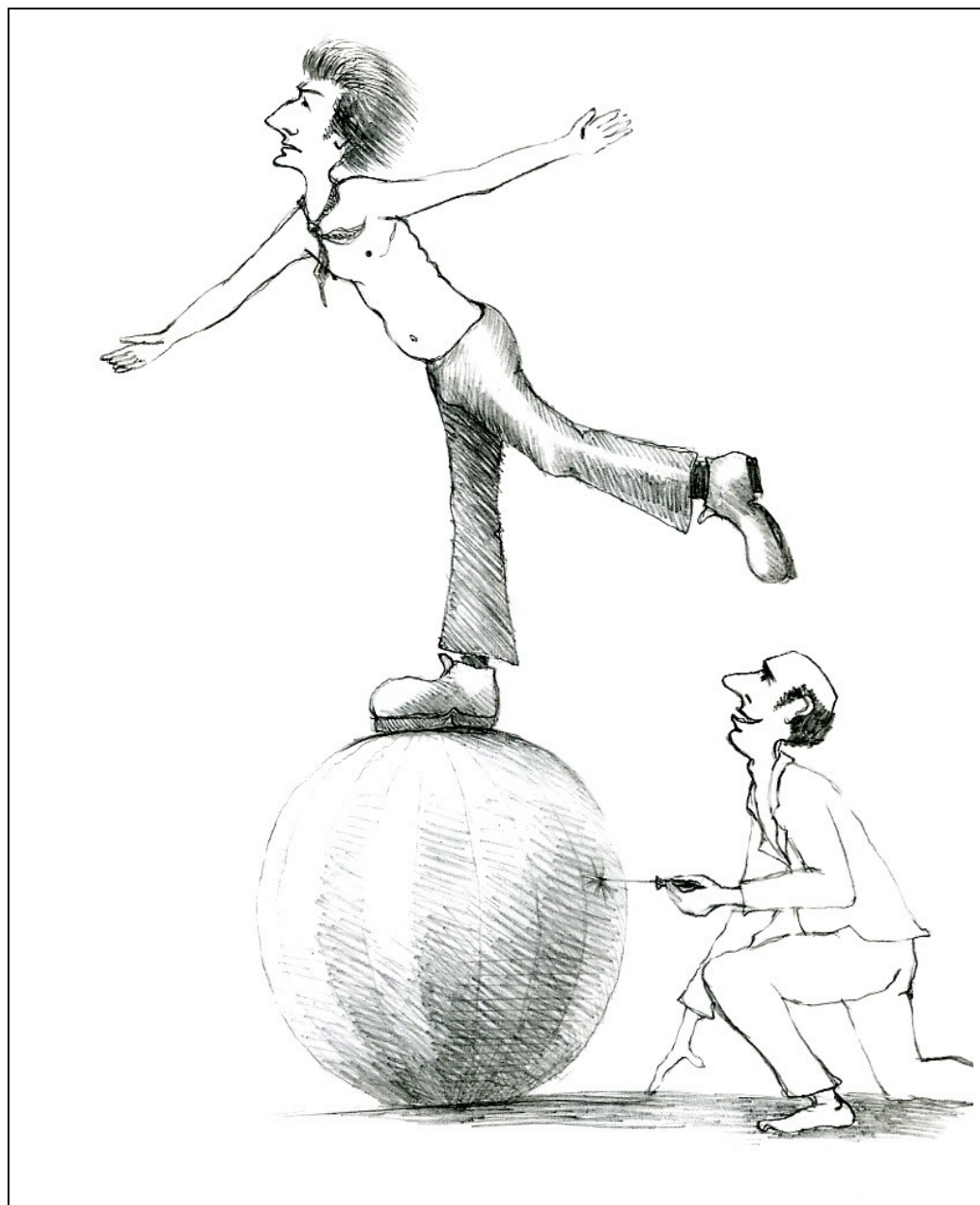
The Wandering Monk slowly shook his head.

“No, my friends, that’s where you’re wrong. There’s never been a good Jesus.”



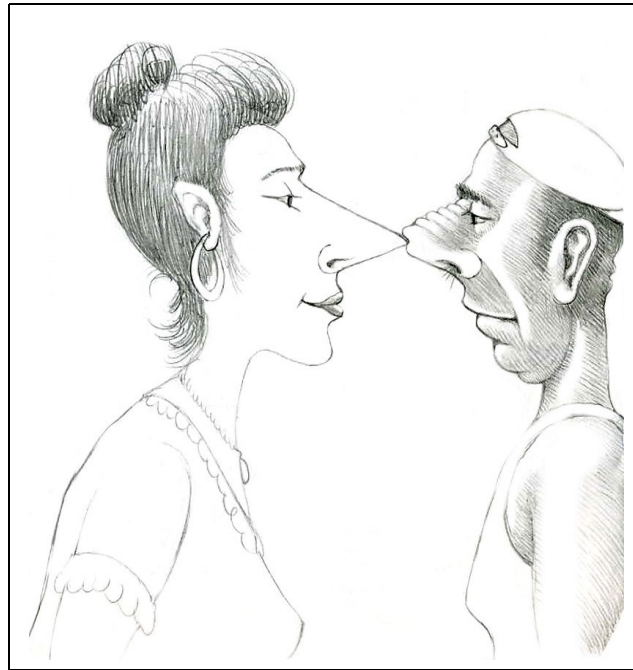
THE STORY OF JULIE'S DADDY

My Daddy always used to say to me: little Julie, never trust people, especially your best friends. Then he would tell me this story. Before he met my Mommy and became my Daddy, my Daddy was a simple farmer. One day he grew tired of ploughing the land, so he decided to join the circus. He quickly became quite famous for his ball-balancing act. But his closest friend Bruno Schmork got jealous of my Daddy's success. So one day when my Daddy was doing his act, Bruno crept from behind, screwdriver in his hand, and popped the ball my Daddy was balancing on. My Daddy plunged to the floor, broke his bones and died shortly thereafter. The reprehensible Bruno took his place, assumed his identity, and in a few years met my mom. They fell in love, and nine months later I was born. That's how cruel and unpleasant life can be.



JONATHAN

Julie is an extraordinary woman. Or so they say, anyway. I like her a lot. You may even say that I love her, whatever that means. Sometimes I think she likes me too. But it's hard to say for sure, because most of the time she drinks champagne and pays no attention to me. It has not always been like that. In the old days we used to drink champagne together. We used to rub noses and had lots of fun.



But when Jonathan came along, I could see that Julie was smitten. Jonathan was an intellectual, the worst kind. He came to our house one night in August, knocked on the door and asked if he could borrow a snow shovel.

“Well, of course, my dear chap,” I said. “Be my guest.”

But he took it too literally, I suppose, because the next thing I knew he was sitting in the living room drinking champagne with Julie. They were obviously attracted to each other. I could see what attracted him in Julie. Julie is an attractive young woman. But I had a hard time seeing what could possibly attract Julie in him. Yes, he'd directed *La Dolce Vita*, he'd composed *Stairway to Heaven* and Beethoven's 9th, he'd painted *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, he'd written *Finnegan's Wake*, he'd invented the yo-yo and the hula-hoop, but so what? I could have done all those things had I bothered. When I looked at him I saw a Lothario, a Casanova and a Don Juan. And I'm not talking the demented old Mexican.

So I went out into the backyard and started my Sopwith Camel.



LAYING BACK AND THINKING OF ENGLAND

On long winter nights Julie and I would curl up in front of the fire and I would read *Mahabharata* to her. When I came to the part about Arjuna's mom arranging for her five sons to marry Draupadi, Julie suddenly got very agitated.

"What a conniving old bitch!" she exclaimed. "Pretended not to know what kind of prize they brought home! *Make sure you divide it evenly!* My mom was totally the same. Every time I brought a boyfriend home, she would snatch him from under my nose and marry him. At one point she was married to five of my boyfriends at once. In fact, the only boyfriend of mine she never bothered to marry was you."

I cleared my throat.

"Julie, I think I've got a little confession to make," I said, hiding my eyes. I hated to upset her, but I was brought up a candid lad.

"So you're also married to my mother... That's nice. What the f..."

"Hold on, Julie, wait. Before you start using adult-oriented language, let me explain. It was a quick civic ceremony at the municipal hall, very simple. I don't even think it was perfectly legal."

"Why not?"

"Well, you see, when the mayor asked me if I was taking your mom as a lawfully wedded wife, I said "I doo".

"So, what's wrong with that?"

"You see, I said "I *doo*", not "I do", but "I *doo*". That means the whole thing was a fake, doesn't it? And you shouldn't judge your Mom too harshly, Julie. She may be your mother, but first and foremost she is a *woman*."

"Tell me, Peter, do you still love her?"

"Well, I've got a lot of respect for her as a person and the mother of my girlfriend. But when it comes down to it..."

"Yes?"

"In the deepest recesses of my heart..."

"Yes?"

I laid back and thought of England.

"No, I suppose not."

"All right, then. Where were we?"

"And then the fair Draupadi was overjoyed: unexpectedly she got five husbands for the price of one..."



SLIPPIN'n'FLIPPIN'

My dog Bingo used to work for the Dalai Lama, sniffing out explosives, and stuff. But he kept on bugging His Holiness with stupid theological questions, like: How come if you're so flippin' divine, you can't even free the flippin' Tibet? So the living god got fed up and slipped a pink slip in Bingo's... well, he wouldn't say where exactly His Holiness slipped it. Anyway, I bought Bingo at the Clever Dog Exchange clearance sale for \$5.99. He's swell. He always picks up his own poop, and when I ask him to bring me my slippers, he replies: "In a sec, Your Holiness." I know it's just a slip of his tongue, but I like it anyway.

Bingo has a son, Ringo. They often have theological arguments. You see, Bingo is an atheist, which means he doesn't believe in anybody, even Santa Claus. His son, on the contrary, thinks that the world is to end next week, and everyone is going to be judged by Mickey Mouse. Bingo has a habit of attacking Ringo's spiritual beliefs. I often hear him yell: "If I wasn't working my ass off for that dolt, bringing him his flippin' slippers all day, who would be buying you all the flippin' Kibbles'n Bits™? Mickey flippin' Mouse?"

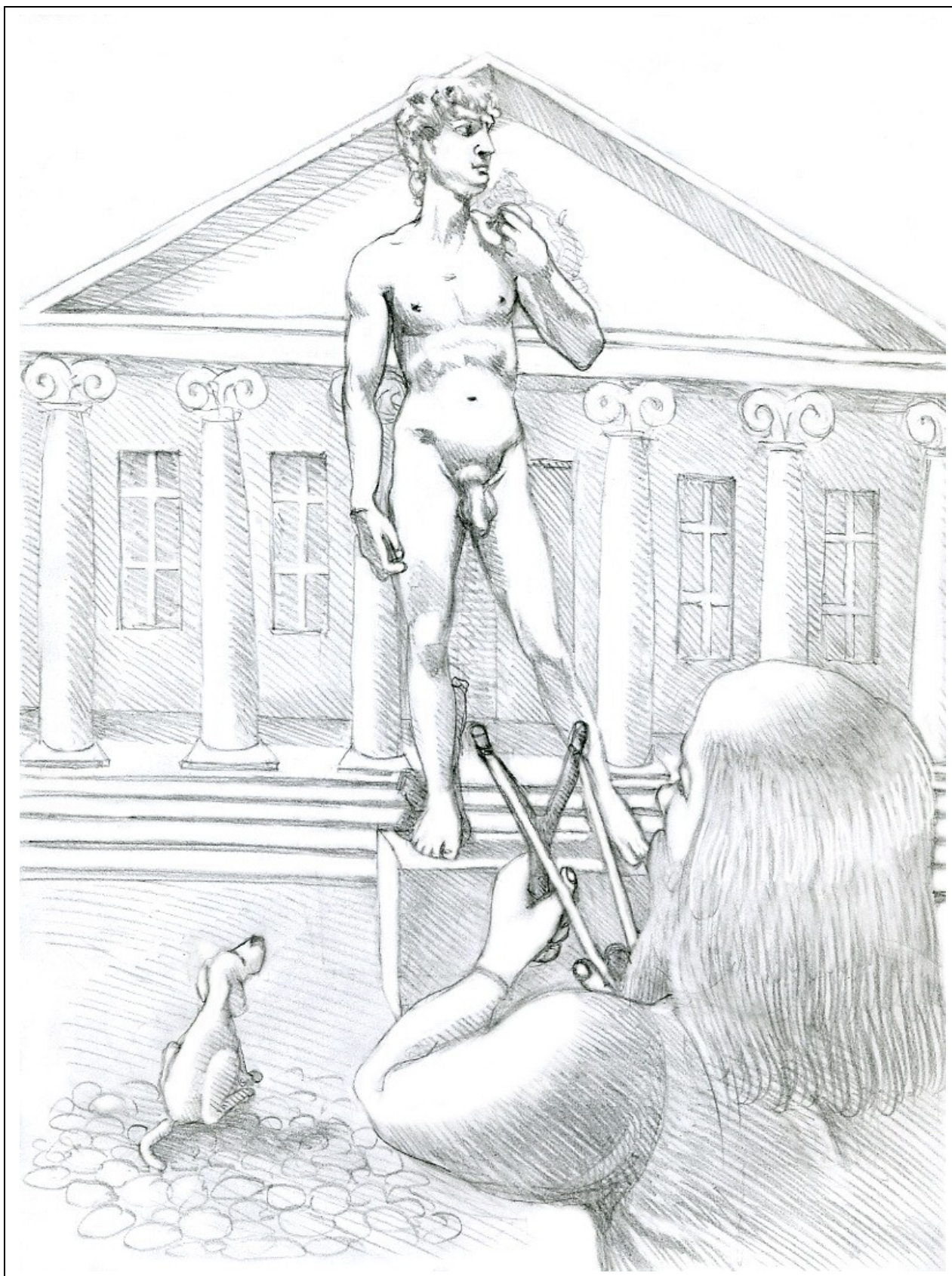
I ask Bingo to go easy on the lad. "You're hurting his religious feelings, Bingo," I say gently. But Bingo doesn't give a flip. At times I understand His Holiness. Bingo is not always easy to get along with. But I'm not selling him. Not yet.



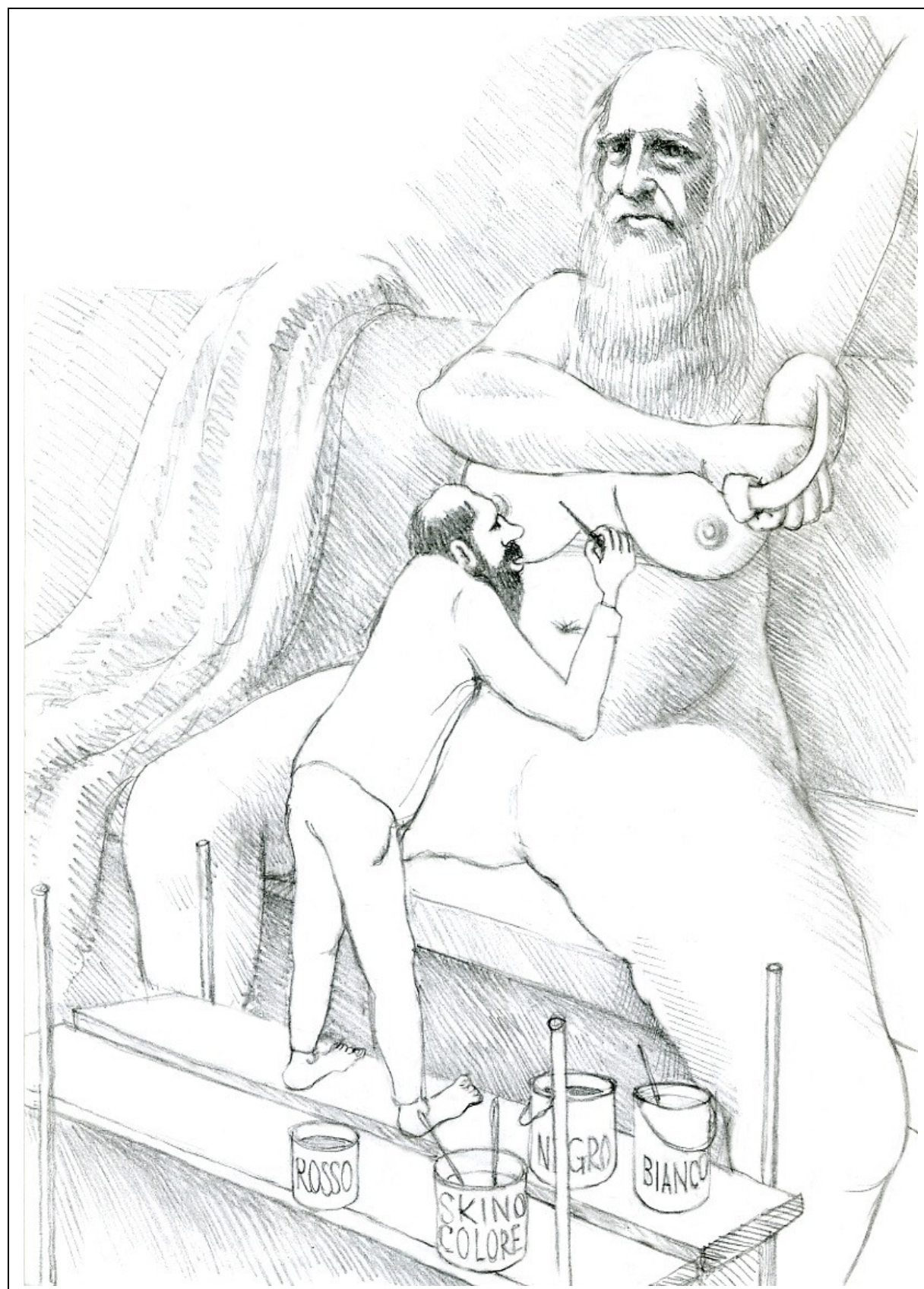
MICHELANGELO AND LEONARDO

Then we bumped into the Wavering Nun, who said that the Wandering Monk was busy somewhere else, but he had asked her to tell us this story should she ever encounter us.

Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci were the best of friends. No, actually, Leonardo hated Michelangelo. And it looked like Michelangelo hated Leonardo back. So it would be safe to say that they both hated each other. In the beginning they sort of tolerated one another, meeting at the Vatican cocktail parties, but when Michelangelo was given the Artist of the Year award and Leonardo got a blue ribbon with the inscription ‘*Also Ran*’, things started to turn nasty. And it didn’t help that in his acceptance speech Michelangelo mentioned “all those no-talent runners-up.” Giorgio Vasari in his best-selling book *How Leonardo and Michelangelo Totally Hated Each Other* recorded a lot of endearing little pranks two great artists played upon one another. For instance, in order to annoy Mick, Leo used to write from right to left. Mick avenged himself by writing with a felt pen on the buttocks of Leo’s lover: “Reserved for Leonardo. No parking at any time.” They would go to incredible lengths to inconvenience each other. When Leo was working in Venice, Mick flooded the whole city. Leo got his feet wet and went down with a cold. When he got better, Leo beat up Mick’s dad. Everyone knew how fond the great artist was of his Papa. Michelangelo caught up with Leonardo in the town of Pisa in Tuscany, which at the time prided itself on having the straightest tower in the whole Italy. Until Mick threw Leo at it, that is. Leonardo called the cops, but they had been bribed by Mick, and they did not care for Leo’s kind anyway. Adding insult to battery, Michelangelo sneaked into the Louvre and drew a moustache on Mona Lisa. Undeterred, Leo took a slingshot and broke off half of David’s private part. And it’s very unfortunate that he did that, as his mischief prompted millions of schoolgirls ever since to bug their art teachers with the same question: “How come David has such a tiny willy?” In my art teaching days I used to wonder if there was anything else in the history of freaking art that female art students cared about! They never asked me what the hell Mona Lisa was grinning about, or why Andy Warhol was such an asshole. All they wanted to know was... But I digress.



Michelangelo at the time was painting the fresco *The Whore of Babylon Having a Bath* for a bathhouse in Florence, and he didn't think twice before endowing the disreputable lady with da Vinci's features. That pushed Leonardo to the brink. He went to the Pope and accused Michelangelo of formalism. The Pope could not stand formalism, so he ordered the Union of Florentine Artists to expel Michelangelo. Therefore the poor genius ended his days on Earth painting murals in supermarkets and restaurants for a bowl of soup. Leonardo, on the contrary, achieved worldwide fame, invented the hula-hoop, and became Pope Leo X. If someone ever says to you that life is fair, you better tell them this story.



BINGO THE CORGI

Have I ever told you how I finally got rid of Bingo? I sold him to the queen as a Corgi. The queen first looked at him and said: “He doesn’t look like a Corgi at all, Peter.” And I said: “But he is, Your Majesty. Never judge the book, you know... Just ask him.” The queen asked Bingo if he really was a Corgi, and he said: “Sure. Whatever.” He wanted to get into the royal household so bad that he would say anything. But the queen was still unconvinced. “Make him swear on the Bible, Your Majesty,” I innocently suggested. “Good idea, Peter,” exclaimed the old lady. “Servants! Fetch me the Bible at once!” But when Bingo heard the word ‘fetch’, he dashed and brought the Bible himself. “Good doggie,” said the queen, patting him on the neck and shaking his saliva off the book. She ordered old Bingo to swear on the Bible that he was a purebred Corgi, which he did.

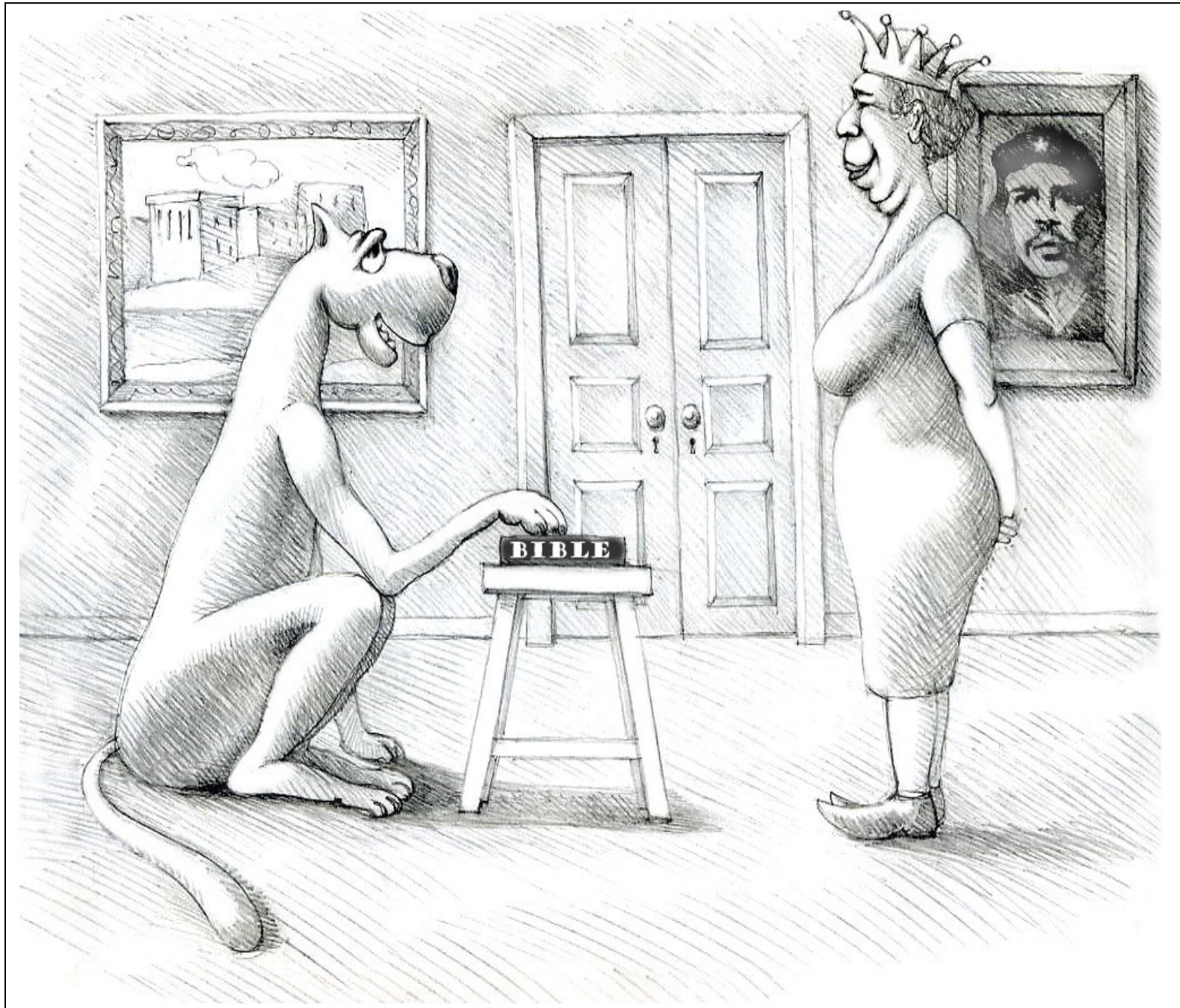
I got my £47.99 and went home whistling a happy tune. When Ringo asked where his dad was, I told him he’d gone to heaven. Ringo was visibly relieved. Now he was free to worship Mickey Mouse and smoke pot as much as he wanted. And he wanted to do quite a bit of both.

A week later I received a letter from his dad.

“My noble master, please take me out of here. I thought I was heading for the life of leisure and pleasure, but I was seriously mistaken. They call me Buddy here, make me hunt mice and badgers (this place is infested with badgers, for some reason), and the princes think it’s a hoot to step on my tail. Ouch! Bloody bastard! He just did it again! Anyway, my noble and benevolent master, if you take me back, I’ll do anything for you. I’ll be the best dog in the world, I’ll be bringing you slippers twelve times a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year including bloody Christmas. Please, please, please! Your affectionate dog Bingo.”

I sat down to write a reply.

“Dear Bingo, I’m glad to hear that you enjoy it at the palace. Unfortunately there is nothing I can do to relieve your suffering. I already spent £47.99, and anyway, it’s all your own fault. Giving a false oath on the Bible is a serious transgression, and now you are paying for it. You see, my friend, there is a God above us after all. He may not be terribly smart, but He does not care much for dogs who give false oaths on the Bible. Ta-ta for now, my dear. If there’s anything else I can do for you, do not hesitate to ask. Ringo would be sending his love if he weren’t too stoned. Gosh, I’ve never seen a dog so stoned in my whole life! I can see the smoke coming out of his ears, all four of them. I hope this second-hand smoke is not going to affect me. Your former master and lifelong friend, Tennessee Williams.”



A month later I read in the papers that Bingo got an MBE. John Lennon had just returned his to the queen, so she had one laying around. Bingo asked if he could have it, and the kind old lady said: “Certainly, Buddy, help yourself.” Now everybody treats Bingo with respect. He’s got his own band. I saw them on the TV the other day and I said: “Ringo, look, that’s your old man!” Ringo said: “Forsooth! Hey, I know that tune! Legalize it, oomp-pa-pa, don’t criticize it...”

Despite his enormous success, Bingo is still the old modest fellow I used to know. Ringo and I bumped into him at the supermarket the other day, and he was really happy to see us. But then I noticed John Lennon down the aisle and said: “Look, Bingo, there’s John Lennon.” Bingo said: “Where? Oops, sorry, I just remembered I’ve got a dentist’s appointment in five minutes. See you guys!” Ringo asked me who the hell John Lennon was, and I told him he was one of the Beatles. Then came a characteristic reply: “Who cares! Mickey Mouse is bigger than the Beatles.”

TOP of the PUPS



THE TALE OF DING-A-MADONGA

It was back in the 60's, when I was backpacking across South America, searching for my inner self, that I stumbled upon this tribe in the Amazon jungle. They had been completely isolated down there. I guess I was the first white person they have seen in 30 years, since Amelia Earhart landed in their area in 1937. They still referred to her as Mabooponga, which means *The Great Yummy One Which Came from the Sky*. Anyway, when I stayed with them, they told me a story about that mythical hero of theirs, Huyonga, sort of our Hercules. And that guy, he had just everything. He had defeated all his enemies, he had the biggest sea-doo, which he used to whoosh up and down the Amazon and scare the crap out of crocodiles. His cellphone never stopped ringing, he'd gotten to know intimately all of the chief's wives, especially that curly one named Brandi. But he still felt that something was missing in his life. He tried to look for that something, but he had no idea what it was. So he went to seek the counsel of the wisest elder, named Pizdonga. That Pizdonga knew everything there was to know.

Huyonga asked the old man:

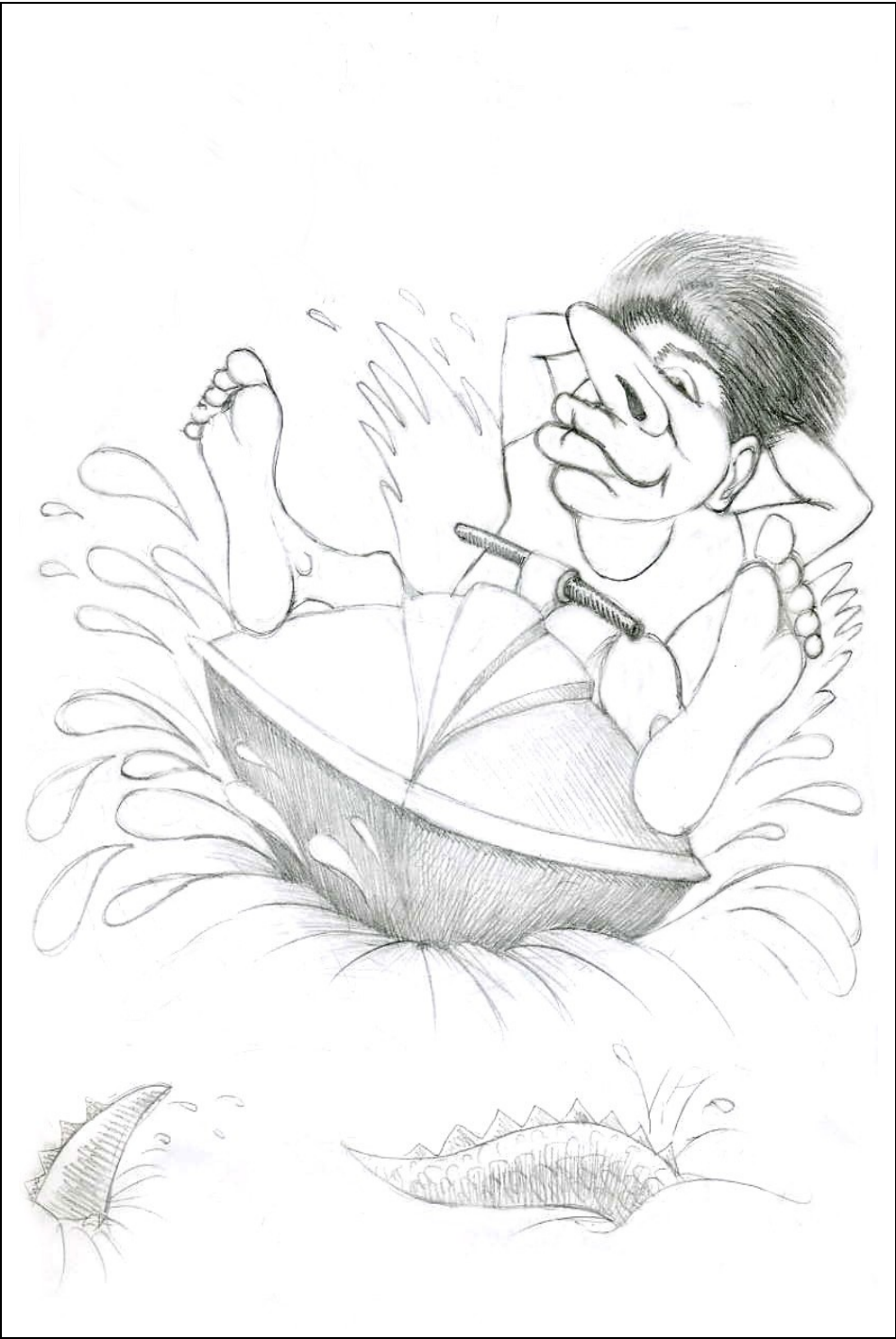
"Tell me, o wise one, what's missing in my life? You see, I've defeated all my enemies, I've gotten to know..."

"I know, I know," Pizdonga interrupted him. "Especially that curly one named Brandi. I've heard a lot about your exploits. You are one cool guy. The only thing that you are missing, son, is called Ding-a-Madonga..."

Then suddenly the old man died quite accidentally, before he could explain what exactly Ding-a-Madonga meant. Some say Huyonga is still out there searching for that mysterious Ding-a-Madonga, but can never find it, because he has no clue what it is.

Julie and I, we are on our own quest to find that thingamabob. Keep on reading, and you may discover the greatest mystery of the Mankind.

THE END OF CHAPTER ONE



CHAPTER TWO

CUTIE AND THE BEAST

Once Julie and I were pretty close. As a matter of fact, we were conjoined twins. No one bothered to separate us at birth, so we grew up together, and like I said, were really close. Not everything was rosy, though. One of the drawbacks was that Julie had become a sort of a wannabe artist, a Frida Kahlo type, who painted those disgusting pictures of her inner world. They were guaranteed to make me want to puke. Admittedly, she was a bit better than Frida Kahlo – for one thing, she wasn’t a commie, and I never saw her sleep with Leon Trotsky – but in every other aspect she was just as bad. At one point she even attempted to grow a moustache.

“You know, Julie,” I would say to her. “My motto has always been: If you can’t bring any beauty into this ugly world, at least refrain from bringing any more ugliness. Indeed, as full as you may be of this crap, why subject innocent bystanders to it? Why not quietly keep it all inside?”

“Ah, shut up,” Julie would reply and keep on painting a rather ugly deer conjoined with a fairly ugly pig. Not a terribly subtle allusion, one might say.

To annoy her, I would play Brahms’ 3rd Symphony on Jew’s harp for hours on end. We finally went to see the therapist, who told us we needed to allow each other more personal space. Eventually we were able to resolve the issue. Julie took up knitting and I became a thinker (a quite important one, some say).

“Honey, could you blow my nose for me please, if you’re not too busy thinking – my hands are all tied up,” she would say to me, and I’d always have a Kleenex handy.



THE POPE AND THE PAUPER

Once again we bumped into the same Wandering Monk, and, completely ignoring our protests, he told us another story.

One day the Pope was sitting in the Vatican, feeling bored. He'd taught everyone how to live, he'd apologized for all the church's misdeeds in the past, and he could not think of anything else to do. He wanted to live the life to the fullest, to roll in the morning dew, to fondle well-formed female buttocks, to make obscene phone calls, to use heavy drugs and explore the meaning of life.

Looking out of the window the Pope saw a pauper who was crossing the piazza. An idea suddenly crossed the Holy Father's weary mind. He invited the pauper inside and ordered him to take his clothes off. The poor guy was used to that kind of stuff, so he disrobed quickly. The Pope did the same, only it took him a bit longer – he had more things on.

"I think we should agree on the fee first, Your Holiness," the pauper suggested, for he'd been burned before. Imagine his surprise when the Pope slipped into his rags and beckoned the pauper to put the papal vestment on. Before the lucky sod could say *Holy Eucharist*, the Pope bolted out, jumped into a taxi and was gone.

A life full of adventures lay before him. Sex, drugs, heavy metal, soup kitchens... But soon he grew tired of it all. There was too much to do. Consider his typical daily routine:

9am: Breakfast at the Holy Virgin mission.

10am: Gang bang at Luigi's.

12pm: Lunch at the Holy Virgin.

1pm: Coke party at Francesca's.

4pm: Orgy at Claudia's.

7pm: Motörhead live show at the Coliseum.

10pm: Dope and s&m extravaganza at Decameron.

5am: Retiring to a bench in the park.

On top of that he was supposed to be raising funds by aggressive panhandling and picking pockets.

The Pope was not a young man, and he could not endure this lifestyle for long. It was the full life, alright, but it was too much too late. He thought of his quiet existence as the Holy Father, when there was hardly anything to do, with a warm fuzzy feeling. So he returned to the Vatican and ordered the acting Pope to switch back.

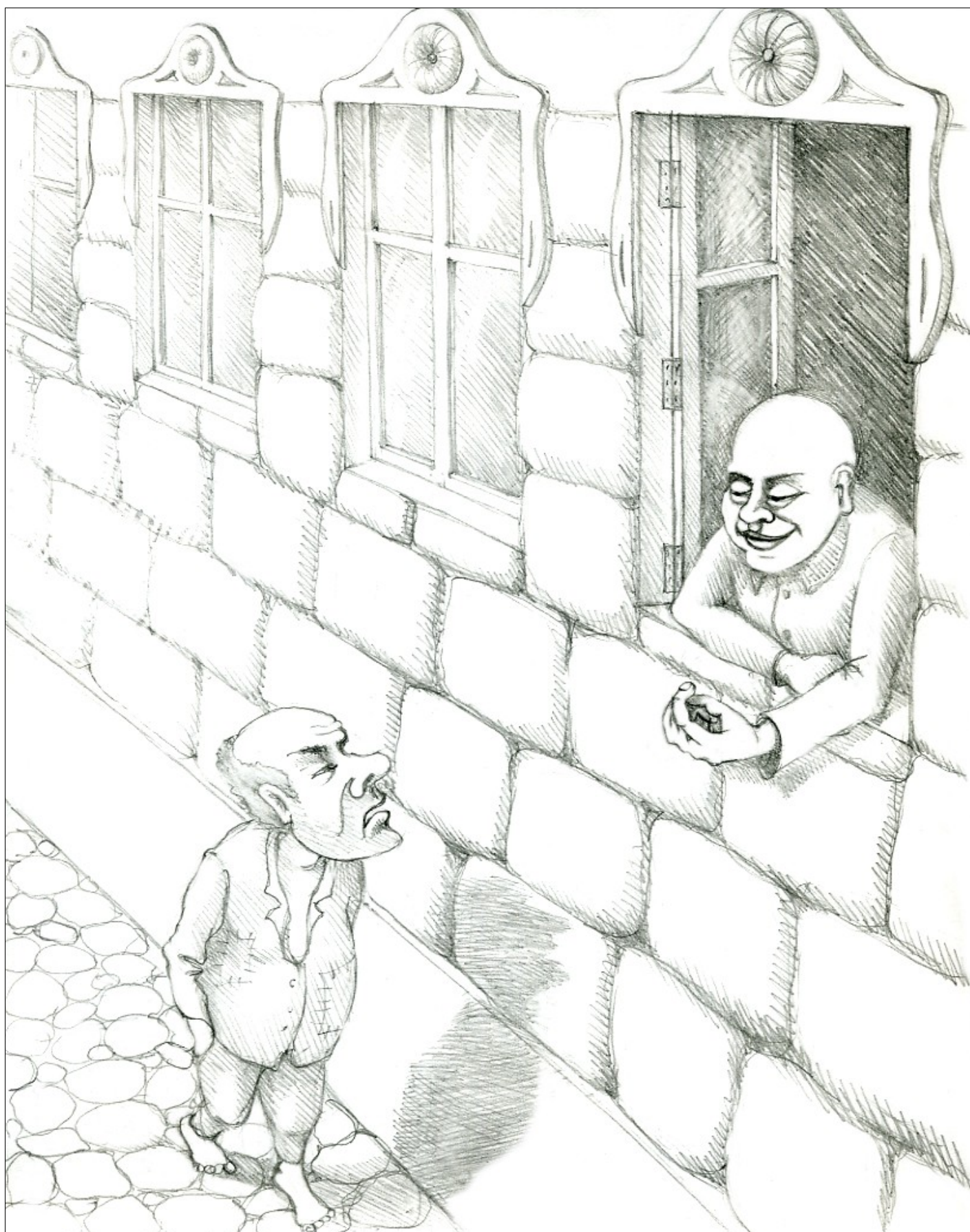
But the pauper-come-Pope wouldn't hear of it.

"I like it here," he announced. "I've never been happier. And stop bugging me, or I'll unleash my cardinals on you."

The former Pope knew better than to risk that, so he quickly walked away, tears streaming down his cheeks. He would give anything to avoid seeing Francesca and Claudia again. He was so desperate that for a minute he even considered moving to Ireland and forming U2, but he dismissed the idea as utterly distasteful.

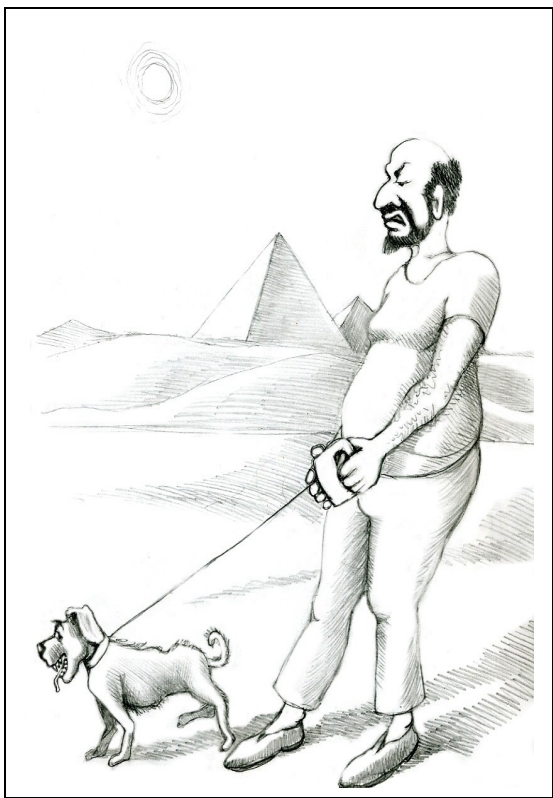
What he had completely forgotten was that the Vatican was hosting an interfaith conference that very week. As the ex-Pope was walking past the window of an exclusive suite where His Holiness the Dalai Lama was staying, he heard a voice speaking with a strong Tibetan accent:

"Hey, poor pauper, come in for a minute, will you?"



BINGO AND THE POLISH UNDERGROUND

When Bingo was just a pup (so he tells me), he lived in Arabia and was recruited by the Polish underground. He had a very keen sense of smell, so they used him to sniff out the enemy's hideouts. The enemy used to eat a lot of garlic, so the smell was easy to pick up from miles away. But the enemy was very cunning, and he started to drink canola oil after every meal, which made Bingo's job much harder since the entire desert smelled of canola oil anyway. When Bingo told the Polish underground about that, they entered the state of wonder. "We wonder," wondered they. "Why would the entire desert smell like canola oil?" So they started digging even deeper underground, and discovered an enormous sea of canola oil under the sand. Then they invited canola oil companies to come and suck the oil out, and everybody made tons of money. Everybody except Bingo, that is. They wouldn't let the dog share in the profits. I think it was then when the seeds of his atheism were first sown.



A CAUTIONARY TALE

Every relationship has certain moments one would pay large sums of money in order to forget. Julie and I had one such moment on September, 14, 1999. On that memorable day we were sucking each other faces, and I accidentally...

Yeah right! That was a deliberate...

...I **accidentally** sucked part of Julie's face in. I promptly apologized and rather hoped the whole incident would be quickly forgotten. But embarrassing incidents rarely go away.

In the past, when chivalry was the code of the day, a man in my situation would have been expected to marry the woman he has just defiled. But today, when women get defiled more often than chickens beheaded, it is hardly the case. So I was quite astonished when Julie said:

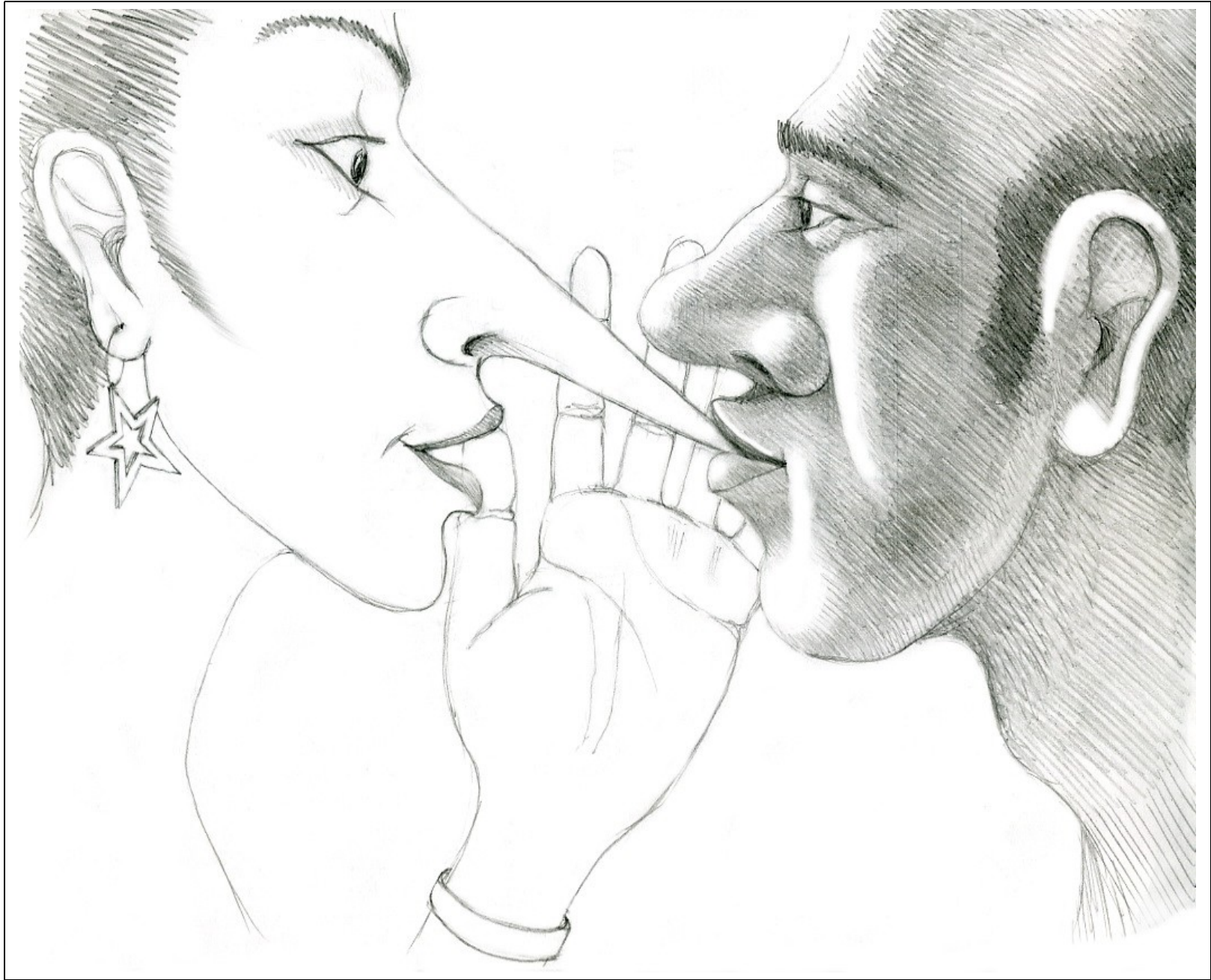
"I hope you understand now, Peter, that you must marry me."

Desperate times required desperate measures.

"But look, Julie, I can't. Have I ever told you what happened to my parents after they got married?"

"I don't think so."

"Listen then. When they met, my parents were normal people in every aspect. My mom was a nurse, and my dad was a roadkill remover. When they were young, they were even more run-of-the-mill. My mom used to be a member of the all-girl punk group the Slits, and my dad was Luciano Pavarotti. As they grew older, their tongues grew longer, and their love for each other grew stronger.



So one day my dad asked my mom's hand in marriage, and she said: "Yeah, sure."

Little did they know that it would lead to an utter disaster. Their wedding had been announced far and wide, and a lot of different people showed up, some of them, as it happens, without invitation. There was one guy who had been to the same school as dad, or something. His name had been totally forgotten, but he invited himself to the wedding as if he was a dear old friend. And he brought an ill-fated present with him.

"What present?"

"A book."

"What book?"

"There was no one around to warn them, nobody who could open their eyes. I hadn't been born yet, and my uncle Nicholas, the only man who had enough sense to avert the tragedy, had been murdered by the Bolsheviks."

"What kind of a book was it?"

"It was a book by Professor Joseph Campbell."

"Who the hell is he?"

"Professor Campbell was the smartest man alive before he died some twenty years ago. The book contained his teachings of profound wisdom. My parents were captivated by them, especially by his insistence that people must do what they most desire, hang on to their rapture. The prof called it *following one's bliss*. Looking deep into himself, Dad discovered that what he desired the most was not scraping dead animals off the road, but to kill little old moneylender ladies. So he proceeded accordingly. Mom did a deep soul searching of her own and realized that her real rapture was not in changing bedpans and sticking needles into people, but in walking the city streets at night dressed in fishnet stockings, accosting passersby with: "Hey, big boy, wanna have some fun?" And that's exactly what she started doing. Of course they found happiness they'd been looking for, doing what they had been so passionate about and enriching the community this way, but can you imagine how I, their only child, felt?"

"How?"

"The way it all was going, it was hardly surprising they were not able to give me a proper birth. People at the hospital had to do it for them, from the conception to the Caesarean. I remember myself as a kid – it was awful. Daddy was constantly on the run from the law, Mommy always at work, oftentimes bringing it home. I was on my own, making myself sandwiches for school. My childhood was completely wrecked, which largely explains why I am such a sad wreck today. And all because one day my parents decided they were not happy enough as they were and would be better off being married."

"What a heartbreaking story. A cautionary tale, indeed. You're right, Pete, let's forget about it. Let's never get married."

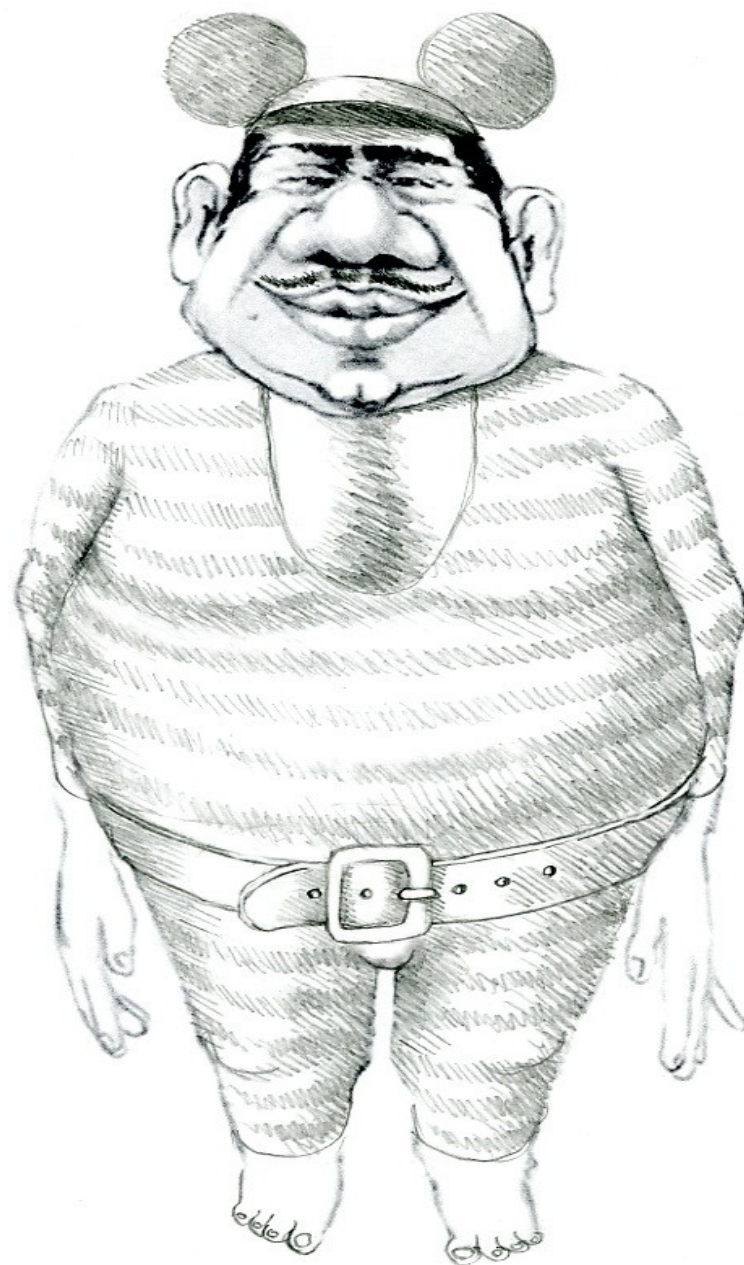
"I love you, Julie."

"Likewise, honey."



THE SECOND COMING OF THE GOOD GOD

At first nobody liked the Good God. They cursed him and blamed him for everything. But then the Good God joined the circus and became a successful trapeze artist. That's when everybody started to like him. And they like him still. Sort of.



DINGO

Once upon a time, Bingo had a dad, Dingo. He was a blues musician. Bingo was saying that it was Dingo who invented rock'n'roll and wrote all the songs for the Hedgehoppers Anonymous and the Beatles. No, actually, he wrote them for himself and left them on his desk. One day the Beatles and the Hedgehoppers Anonymous dropped by to learn about the rock'n'roll he had invented and saw a bunch of songs laying around, so they grabbed them just in case. They were always on the lookout for songs to sing, especially good ones. When they got home, they divided the songs between themselves, snorting with glee. Dingo never noticed that the songs were missing until he heard them on the radio. Somehow the Hedgehoppers got all the best ones, and the Beatles got all the crap. That's how it came to pass that the Hedgehoppers became the #1 band in the world, and the hapless Beatles faded into obscurity. As for Dingo, he went on to form Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band and wrote many more great songs, as well as some really crappy ones.

When Dingo was just a pup, he also had a dad, Gringo. But nothing seems to have ever happened to Gringo that is worth telling about. Nothing whatsoever.



A GIRL REMINDS ME OF A BUS

Apart, of course, from the poem he wrote in his young days. Many moons ago, when Gringo was a young and wild dog, he fell in love with a girl, but their romance was short-lived and left the poor Gringo in tears. Then the Mighty Hedgehog tried to console him and offered the following words of advice: “Never run after a girl or a bus – there’s always another one coming”. Dingo thought about it for a bit and then wrote the following poem:

A girl reminds me of a bus.

A girl reminds me of a bus.

Unlike the rest of us,

A girl reminds me of a bus.

And when she walks out of your life, don’t ever try to catch her.

Just wait a quarter of an hour and I will betcha,

You’ll see another one pull over just outside your door.

And you won’t have to look so broken-hearted anymore.

It would be silly to feel sad about the bus that you’ve just missed.

There’s more of them at the depot just waiting to be kissed.

Or rather to be boarded slowly and with proper care.

Then you can tell the driver: ‘Destination – anywhere!’

A girl reminds me of a bus.

A girl reminds me of a bus.

Unlike the rest of us,

A girl reminds me of a bus.

(Trumpet solo)

I like to wash them clean and shiny after quite a busy day.

I like the way they shyly nod when asked if I could stay.

And in the quiet of the night when you could hear a needle drop,

Out of the blue the driver yells: ‘There’s no more room on top!’

Oh, I must say, a double-decker’s such a beautiful machine,

Sometimes I do prefer it to a girl, if you know what I mean.

It largely keeps its big mouth shut, it always stops on red.

It seldom tells our mutual friends that I’m not very good in bed.

A girl reminds me of a bus.
A girl reminds me of a bus.
Unlike the rest of us,
A girl reminds me of a bus.

He also wrote the following poem about his buddy, the Mighty Hedgehog:

Once I was a magic cat,
Pulling rabbits out of my hat.
Then I turned into a dog.
Next I'll be the Mighty Hedgehog.

The Mighty Hedgehog is something to be.
He carries down kittens stuck in a tree.
He pulls drowning badgers out of the stream.
Explains to gorillas that life's but a dream.

Who's afraid of the Mighty Hedgehog?
The Endless Fox and the Multiple Frog.
They plot and conspire to have him retire.
But he's got a knack for coming right back.

The Mighty Hedgehog is something to be.
He'll sell LSD to you almost for free (well, pretty cheap, anyway)
He saves Piccadilly from ruthless wild pigeons.
Explains to chipmunks about God and religion.

Pretty squirrels all agog,
Crazy 'bout the Mighty Hedgehog.
But he's very modest, he is even shy.
When asked where he's from, he points to the sky.

The Mighty Hedgehog is something to be.
He personally knows every fish in the sea.
He reads PG Wodehouse at night in his bed.
He listens to Yes, that's his favourite band.

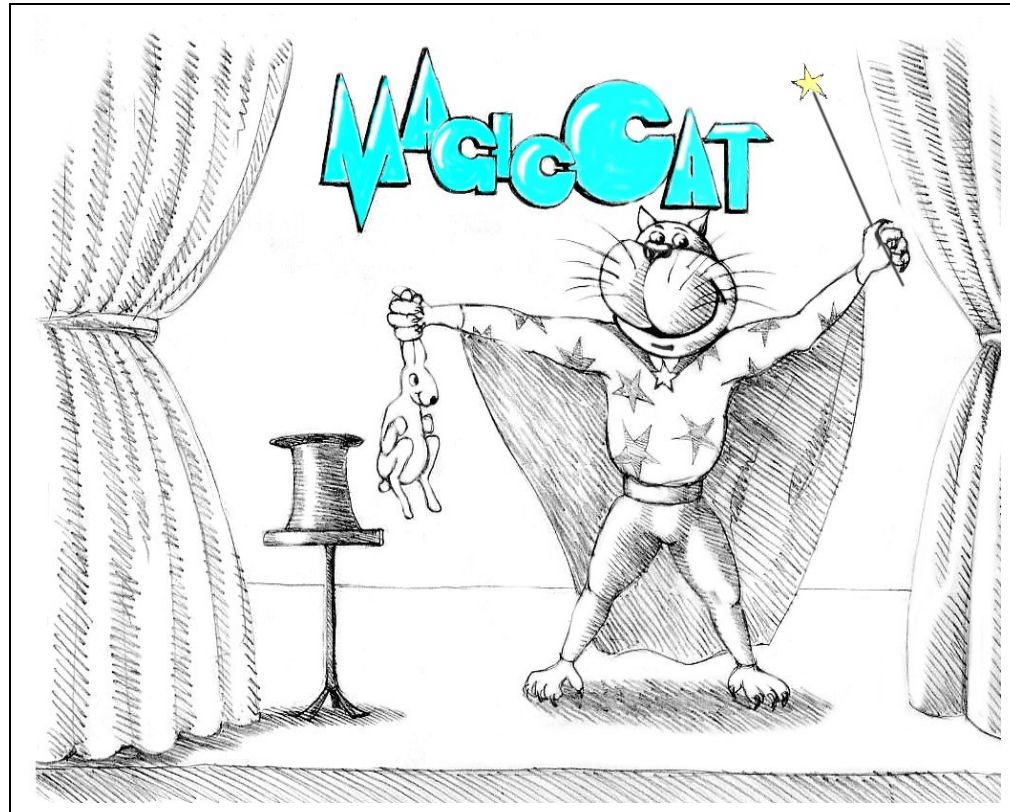
(Trumpet solo)

Once I was a magic cat,
Pulling rabbits out of my hat.
Then I turned into a dog.
Next I'll be the Mighty Hedgehog.

MAGIC CAT

Before we were humans, we were animals. I was a cat called Magic, and Julie was a white bunny I used to pull from my top hat. I don't know why, but that act was immensely popular. Before the very eyes of the bemused audience I put Julie the rabbit into the hat, said 'Abracadabra!' and pulled her out again. The house would go wild. I thought anybody could do that, but apparently they believed it was a magic trick of some sort. That's where my name came from, I suppose.

Possibly there is a subliminal explanation to it. I've noticed that people had always been fascinated by the act of sticking something into something, then pulling it out again. Who knows? Anyway, Julie and I travelled around the world with our Magic Show, and I had many admirers. Matilda was one of them. She was a fat cat, beautiful and smart. I made her my assistant. Julie did not look happy at all. "Why do we need an assistant anyway?" she grumbled. "She wouldn't fit into the top hat, the way she is." "I could saw her in half," I suggested. "I wish you would," mumbled Julie under her breath, but I heard her. I think she was a bit jealous. But what did it matter? I loved Matilda with all my heart. But then I realized that she was not what she appeared to be, so I told her: "You must leave now, Matilda. You've played with my heart, and you broke it in the process. Go now and never come back." She did, and I never saw her again. That was just as well. My career had always been a priority to me, the romance came in second or third. My children got used to call Julie Mommy. Tabloids all over the world were having a ball. "Magic Cat Dumps His Fat Assistant!" Some printed topless photos of Julie and me, so I sued them. In the end Julie's quiet determination won the day, and I married her. That was probably the only time we had ever been married. But then again, we were mere animals back then.



THE GOOD GOD STRIKES AGAIN

**Once the Good God tried to
undermine the world
order. As a result he had to
spend a fortnight in the
slammer. Let this be a
lesson to us all.**



GRINGO AND THE PERSONALITY DISORDER

One day Gringo developed a severe personality disorder, which he duly documented in the following poem:

I don't wanna be a dog no more.
I don't wanna be a dog no more.

I'd rather be a sparrow,
I'd rather be a snail,
I'd rather be a monkey,
Or even Florence Nightingale.

I don't wanna be a dog no more.
I don't wanna be a dog no more.

I wonder what I'd be
If I weren't born a dog.
Could be the Magic Cat perhaps,
Or better yet, the Mighty Hedgehog.

I don't wanna be a dog no more.
I don't wanna be a dog no more.

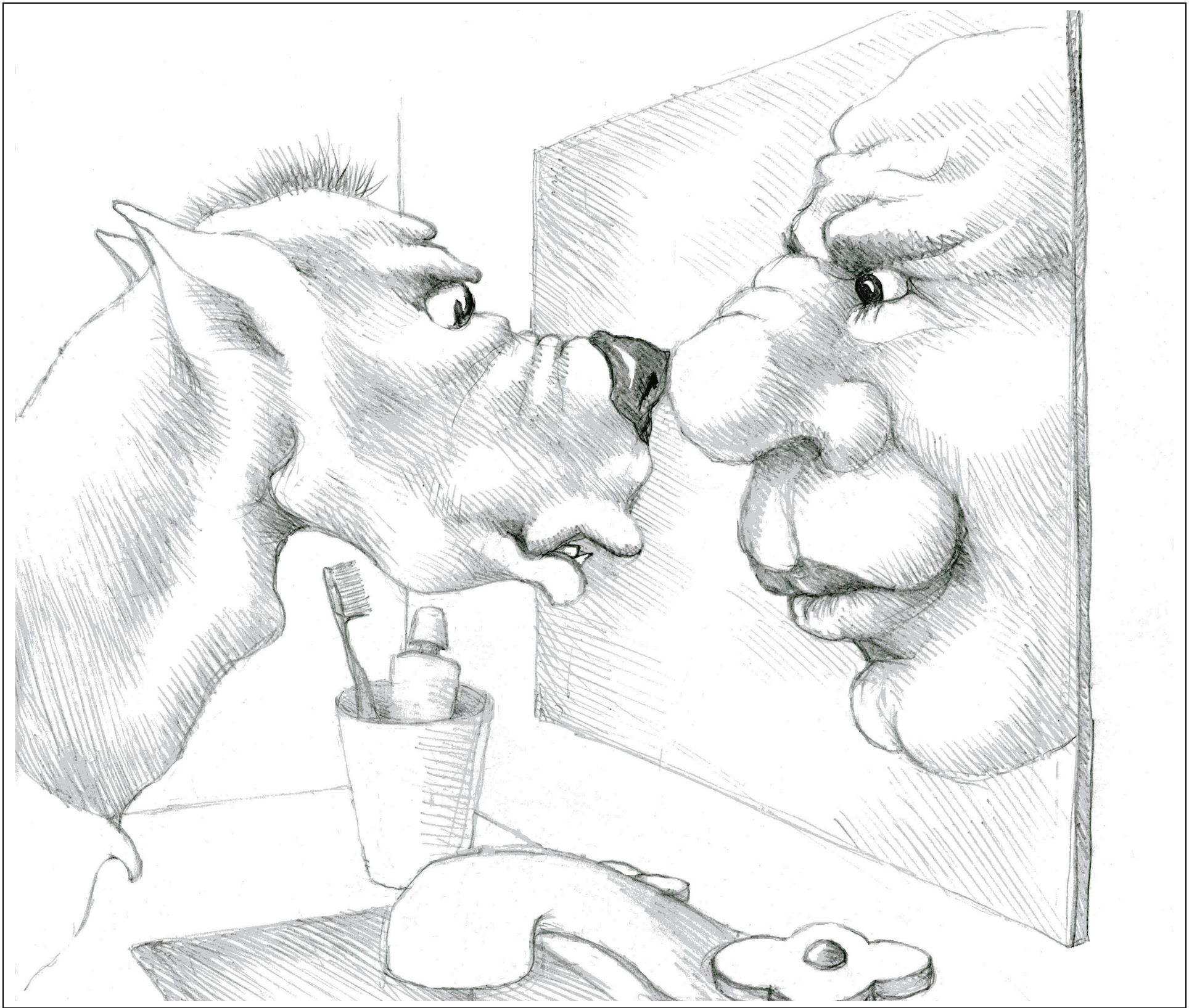
My father used to tell me
That life is full of fun.
I haven't seen any yet,
And I am almost 21.

My outlook is gloomy,
My nose is always wet.
My girlfriend is a bitch (oh yeah)
She drives around in my Corvette.

But I've always been a dog,
And that was just as well,
Until somebody told me
That all the dogs go straight to hell.

I look into the mirror.
I'm in a dreadful spot!
Somebody spelt me backwards,
And I have turned into a God!

I don't recall when was the last time I read so much rubbish. Not bad, actually, don't you think?



THICK AS A RICK

Like I said, sometimes relationships take wrong turns, and you can't help feeling embarrassed. But nothing can be more embarrassing than to be part of a B-movie. I wouldn't wish it to happen to my bitterest enemy. Once Julie and I found ourselves in a movie like that. I was Rick, an American, and like all Americans, I was a strong and silent type. At least that's how Americans like to perceive themselves. It was during the World War II, somewhere in North Africa, Morocco or Portugal, or whatever. I had a restaurant there, or a laundromat, I can't recall. Then Julie stumbled in, I don't remember what her name was, but she was a woman from my past who had dumped me, or so I thought. Little did I know that while we were having fun in Paris, her then-husband was sitting in a Nazi slammer, presumed dead. But if that was the case, why couldn't she stay celibate for at least some time out of respect for him before hitching up with another guy?

Well, I tried. I really tried, I swear. But when I met an American, I felt my resolve melting like a piece of butter on a frying pan. I just could not stay celibate any minute longer. Americans are so cool, you know. Every time I meet one...

I know, I know. The strong and silent types. Anyway, years later she stumbles into my restaurant/laundromat and I give her dirty looks 'cause I think she dumped me in Paris, while she merely got back to her hubby as soon as she learned that the Nazis had set him free, as any faithful wife would do. He happened to be a big Kahuna in the Resistance movement, and apparently the Nazis later reconsidered and wanted him back in the slammer, because when Julie and him turned up in Morocco, they were most anxious to leg it to New York, NY, where apparently all the Resistance movement's headquarters were at the time. No wonder the Resistance fizzled out in Europe as soon as it did when it was directed from Brooklyn, thousands of miles away. Anyway, I was in the position to help them escape, but as I didn't know Julie had merely acted as a faithful wife and not as a trollop, I was reluctant to lend them a hand, and kept saying some nonsense like: "Here's looking at you, kid," and "Never play it again, Sam." I was really embarrassed having to say all that, but I had no choice – the ghastly screenwriters gave me those lines. I tried to say them with the least conviction possible, in order to convey to the audience that I'm in it against my will. Meanwhile, Julie's position was the hardest. She was really painful to look at. She just could not decide who she would sleep with from now on. On one hand there was her hubby – the leader of the Resistance and an all-around nice guy. Unless you happened to be a Nazi, of course – in which case he was in the habit of slapping your face, stomping on your toe and calling you some really offensive names – which was known to reduce even the most hard-boiled Nazis to tears. (I personally think that the guy was a bit too hard on the poor buggers: all they ever wanted was to take over the world, but he would have none of that). On the other hand – the strong and silent American with his own restaurant/ laundromat (which comes in quite handy when you quickly need to eat /wash something).

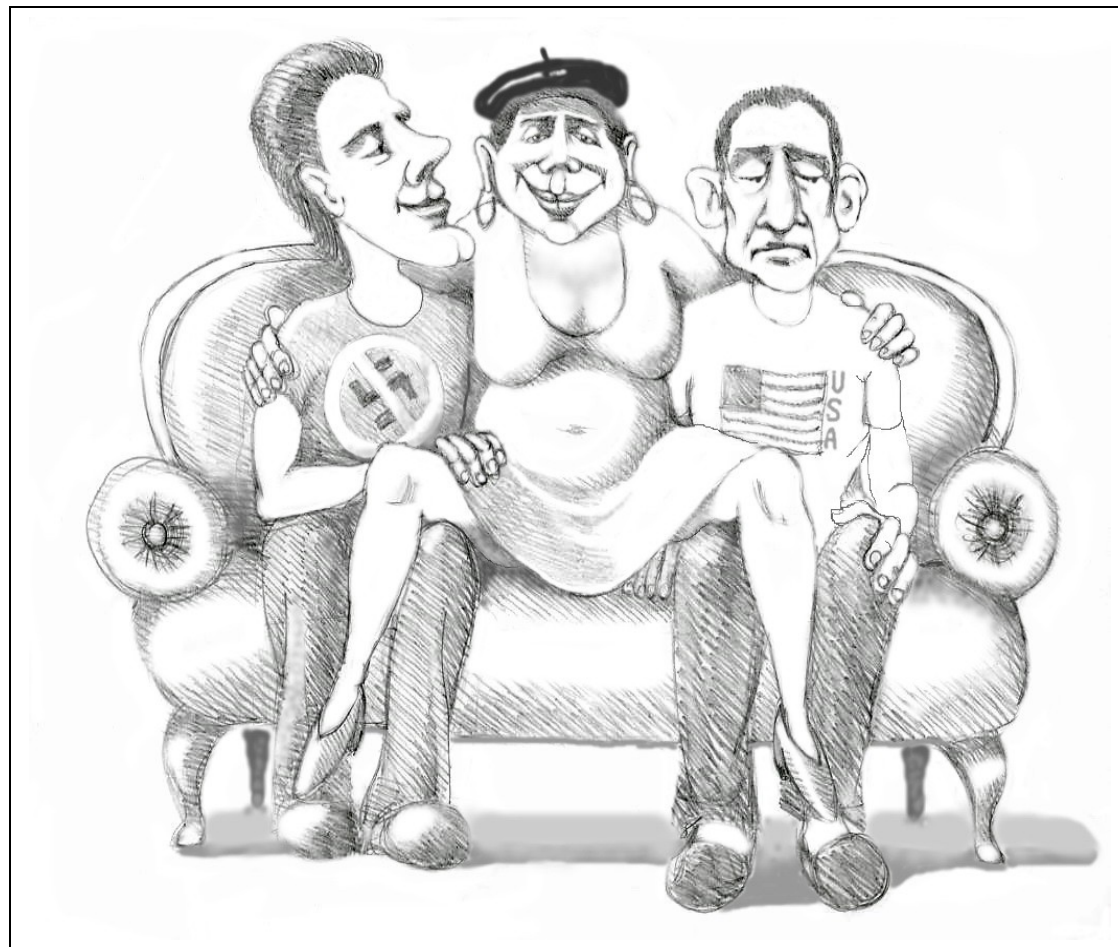
That's true, back in Paris you didn't have any restaurant, so dumping you was easier. Honestly, I never thought you would go as far as owning your own eatery, not to mention a laundromat.

Neither did I. But what do we know? I also had a cool roulette table, which had been tampered with to make sure the house always won, unless I wanted otherwise, of course, but as you can imagine, I rarely wanted otherwise. So Julie just couldn't decide which one of us to choose, and I don't blame her. Sadly, three-way marriages were not so popular then. Anyway, when I found out that Julie was not a floozy but the woman of immense inner beauty, I decided to send her and

her hubby to New York, NY. But I didn't tell them anything, and the audience expected me to ship the hubby to the USA and come into the possession of Julie again, which wouldn't be very nice of me, would it, so everyone was really proud of me when I put them both on the plane to America, the land of the strong and the silent. The result of that was most embarrassing: the Nazis arrested and executed some innocent resistance fighters (the so-called *usual suspects*) for the murder of a German general which I accidentally committed, and I got myself a new companion – a sleazy and obnoxious Frenchman. Don't ask. In the last scene I embraced him and promised it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. I swear I didn't fancy him one bit, but the bloody screenwriters must have decided I needed some compensation after losing the same chick two times over. That I can understand, but why the French bastard? As if there were no dames left in Portugal. Like I said, it's a painful memory, but I've read somewhere that if you go on hiding your painful memories, they will keep on haunting you, so I think it's for the better to air all that dirty laundry. Or put in on everybody's menu.

Look at the bright side, Pedro. We could have been in that movie about a Russian doctor with a weird name who was screwing some slut while his wife was giving birth to their child in the middle of Siberia torn apart by the civil war. Would you prefer that, Pyotr?

I guess you're right, Yulia. There's a bright side to everything, innit?



THE HAPPY QUEEN

Despite faring poorly at the charts, the Beatles were always welcome at the Buckingham palace. They played at every party there and were always paid five quid each for their troubles. Every time the servants heard a lot of noise and smelled ganja in the hallways, they knew: the Beatles were there. But one day Black Sabbath, who fared at the charts even worse than the Beatles, kidnapped the Fab Four, put on their clothes and wigs and sneaked into the Palace. Once inside they took their guns out of guitar cases and kidnapped the Queen and her relatives at the gunpoint. They took them to an undisclosed location across the road and kept them there hoping to raise some funds. But nobody cared to pay the ransom. Even when Black Sabbath reduced the amount from £1 million to £24.99, there were still no takers. Three years later the Royal family was finally set free for free, but when Her Majesty and the rest returned to the palace, they found that it had been turned into a hospital, and they were refused entry because they were in perfect health. Oh, yes, and the ground floor had been turned into a daycare centre.

If you're thinking this is going to be one of those heart-wrenching stories about people who lost everything only to embark on a painful journey to spiritual redemption, you are quite mistaken. Oh, no, wait, you're quite right. This *is* actually a heart-wrenching story about people who lost everything only to embark on a painful journey to spiritual redemption. But it has a happy ending, sort of. The queen found a job as a cleaner at the daycare centre, and her husband became a night guard at Harrod's. They were scraping by, but they were happy. Their children helped out a lot, doing dishes, washing, ironing and so on, except sometimes they could do no ironing because their dad would drink away the iron. But they were happy.

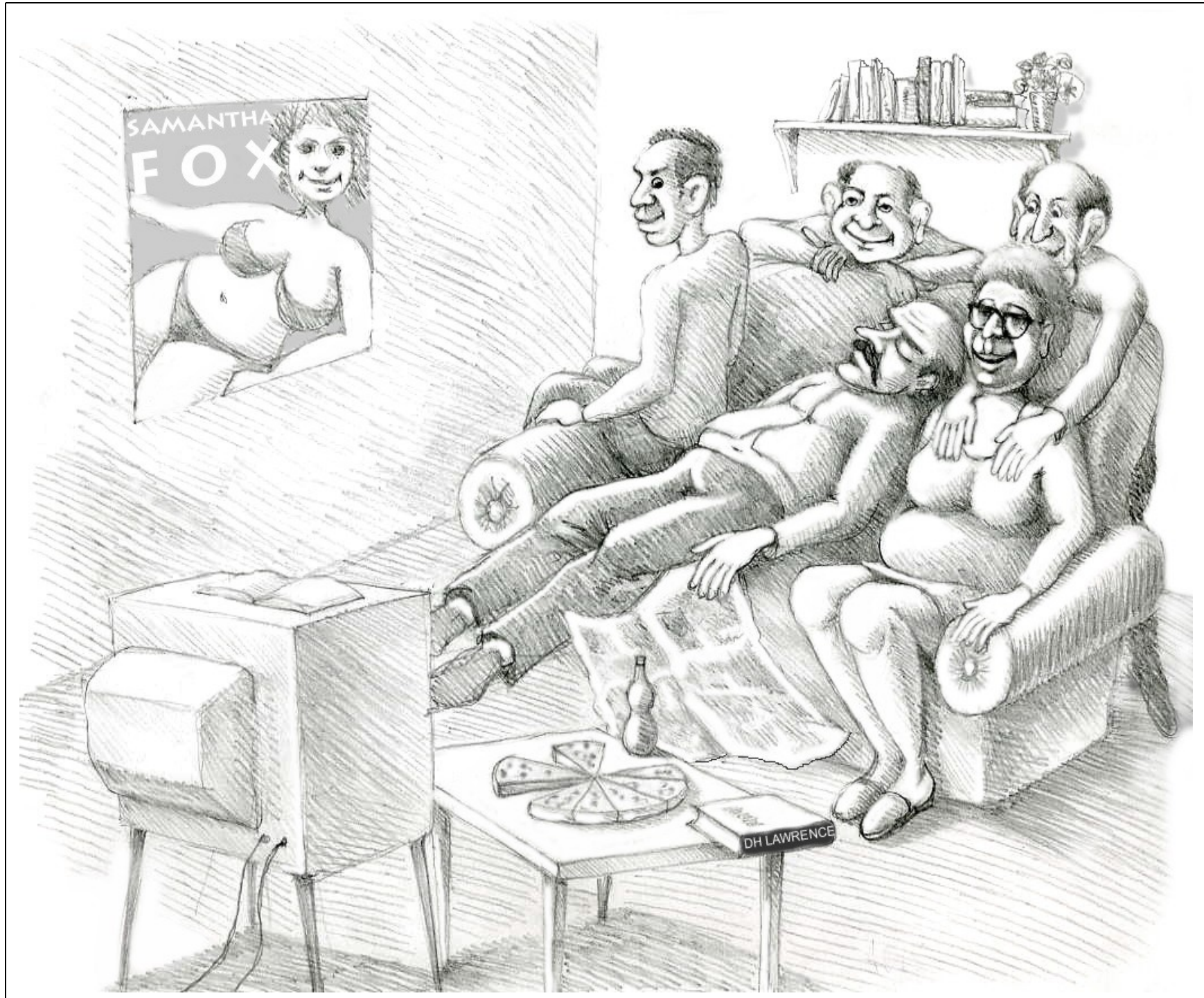
"You know, Bobby," the queen would say to her husband. "I think we are happier now that we earn our own bread than when we lived in a gilded cage in that blasted palace."

"Watch your language, Tracy dear," the duke would implore.

"No, Bobby, I mean it. How can one possibly miss that goddamn life, that flippin' royal protocol, court bastards constantly using us to their advantage, having to smile at Vladimir Putin, the bloody Beatles giving us headache and second-hand ganja poisoning, all that meaningless pompous routine, tabloids giving us hell, the bloody Corgis pooping everywhere, having to visit freakin' Canada every ten years? Now at last I can read the book I've wanted to read all my life, but was afraid the servants would notice – *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by DH Lawrence. Now we can order pizza, go to the movies, have fun. Isn't it what life is all about, Bobby dear?"

"Yeah, yeah, whatever."

At this very moment across the ocean Black Sabbath were kidnapping Patty Hearst. Again.



THE GOOD GOD IS BACK IN BUSINESS

After the Good God was released from the slammer, he was back in business of being a good god. Some were even saying that he was now better than ever. Which only goes to show, doesn't it?



DR. MARTIN

Another one from the Wandering Monk via the Wavering Nun.

Dr. Martin was an honest man. But he also was a politician. That makes him an honest politician. Oxymoron, you will say. Well, admittedly, he was quite unique within his walk of life, so it's hardly surprising that he often attracted school tours and busloads of gawkers. He liked to address prison populations.

"Remember, guys, it's highly important to be honest. If I can do it, you can do it too."

"But you don't wanna be too honest, Doc," argued some inmates. "Bad people can take advantage of you."

But Dr. Martin was adamant.

"Honesty's reward is clear conscience," he liked to point out.

Once he was sent to Afghanistan to inspect Canadian troops and was captured by the Taliban freedom fighters.

"Where you from, mister?" inquired the bearded men who fought for freedom. Dr. Martin knew it would be safer to say he was from Saudi Arabia, or, say, Yemen, but he was the honest one, remember?

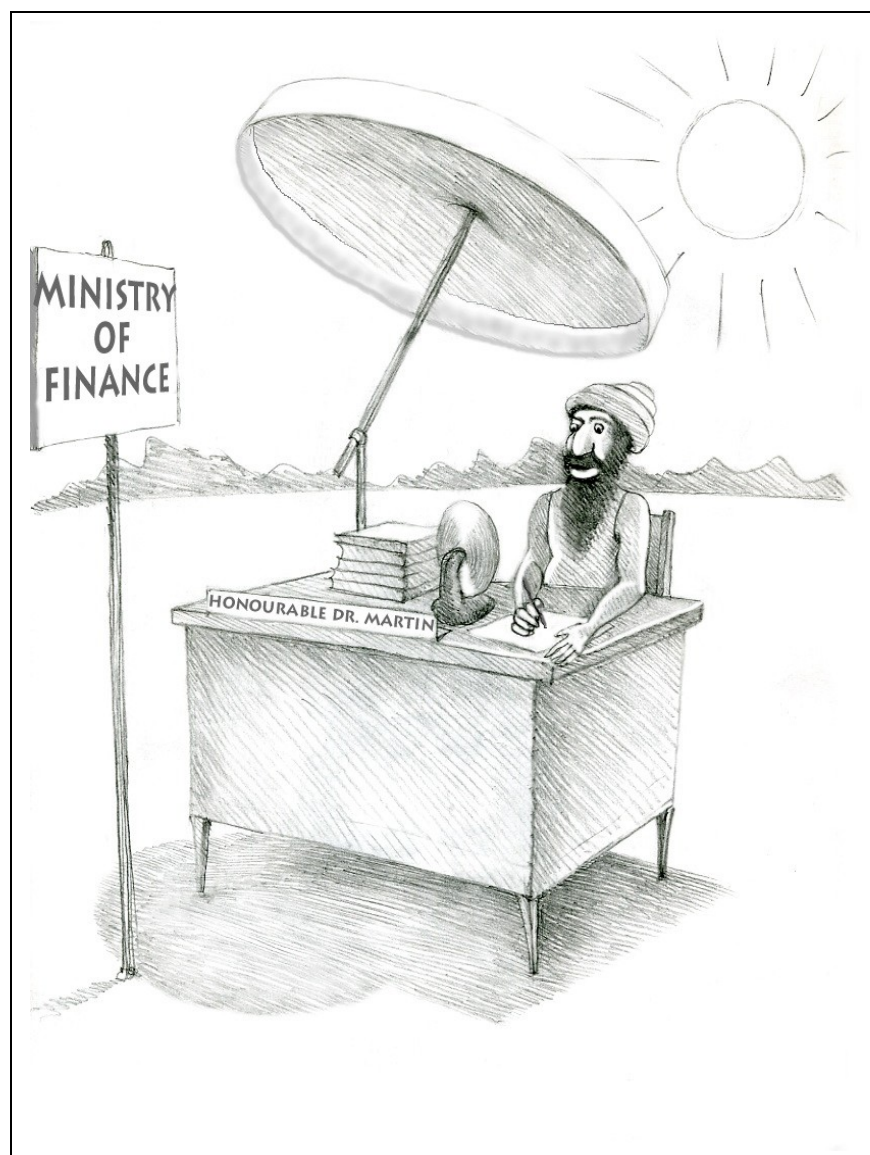
"I am from Canada," he said.

"Oh, so you from Kanada? And what doing you here on Afghanistan?"

It would be safer to say he was on holidays, but Dr. Martin always told the truth.

"I'm supposed to be inspecting Canadian troops," said he.

Now, the Taliban was not stupid. Or rather, as everyone knows, there are two Talibans: one stupid, and the other one, which is not stupid. And such was Dr. Martin's luck, that he got captured by the latter. Once the Taliban saw they were dealing with an honest man, they decided to take advantage of him. They appointed him their chief accountant. You see, they had a lot of money channelled to them through international networks, but most of it was going missing. Dr. Martin had to make sure that all the money was spent on suicide bombers, not on belly-dancers at *Nebuchadnezzar's*. And he did his job so well that in a month *Nebuchadnezzar's* was shut down due to lack of business, and the Taliban had thousands of well-fed suicide bombers at their disposal. They drove the coalition forces out of the country, the Taliban got back in power and put burqas back on women. Dr. Martin ended up Finance Minister in the new Taliban government, and pretty soon Afghanistan was ahead of China in economic growth. See how much damage can one honest idiot inflict?



TOMCAT AND BOBCAT

Back when I was a cat, I had two twin buddies, Tomcat and Bobcat. They had a girlfriend, Kittycat, and they were all roommates. Now, back in those days you could not be a roommate if you didn't have a mother. So Kittycat invited her mother, Suziecat, to come over and stay. Suziecat was one hell of a cat – one might call her humongous, yes, but she was also kind and gentle, the way most mothers are. Now the pressure was on Tomcat and Bobcat to produce their mother, but they turned out to be orphans, which meant they had no right to be roommates. So they are leaving our story (so long, guys!), but we still have Kittycat and Suziecat to worry about. Oh, yes, we also have Lizziecat, the charming offspring of Tomcat, Bobcat and Kittycat, but she is hardly relevant to our story. We must rather focus on the tale of Kittycat and Suziecat, and their complex relationship.

The problem first arose when Kittycat brought home her boyfriend, who happened to be no other than Ringo, son of Bingo (son of Dingo (son of Gringo)). As worthless runts go, Ringo was a perfect epitome. He was lazy, smoked a lot of pot and spent his days watching Mickey Mouse cartoons and Seinfeld reruns. A sensitive girl like Kittycat definitely deserved something better. And that's exactly what her Mom told her when she came home from work one day and found Ringo on the living room carpet, scratching himself and howling: "Mickey loves me, yes he does!"

"Get out of here, you scum," Suziecat politely suggested, for politeness had always been one of her strongest points. "Kittycat, a sensitive girl like you definitely deserves something better than that."

"But Mommy, please. I love him," pleaded Kittycat, but all in vain.

In the meantime, Ringo passed out on the carpet. Kittycat thought he was dead, so she took some rat poison and passed out as well, but didn't die. A week later Ringo came to his senses, saw the lifeless Kittycat next to him, thought her dead, smoked a joint and passed out again. The next Thursday Kittycat came out of the stupor, saw the lifeless Ringo by her side and went back into coma. Two days later Ringo regained whatever he passed for consciousness, saw his lifeless girlfriend, etc. It went on like this for a couple of weeks, until Suziecat got fed up and called the local pound. Kittycat and Ringo got impounded, but it all turned out for the best, because they received free detox treatment and were back to their cheerful selves in no time. Which we wish we could say for Suziecat and her cousin Kevincat, who came over to lend his support in these difficult times. But that's a completely different story.

THE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT STORY

As we have said, Kevincat was Suziecat's cousin. Or brother. An uncle, perhaps. Chances are he was her illegitimate son. Anyway, he came over to lend his support in these difficult times. But instead he fell in love with Kittycat. Now, we're entering a rather slippery territory here. Or maybe not, because their relationship was purely platonic. All they did was sit on the sofa and listen to Stray Cats while Ringo was watching his Disney™ Channel. Suziecat would protest: "Turn this bloody noise off! Better put Cat Stevens on." But they hated Cat Stevens.

Suddenly Tomcat and Bobcat were back (welcome back, guys!) They had found a mother somewhere, so they had the right to be Kittycat's roommates from now on. It all started to look a bit too crowded. I mean, seven cats and a dog in the two-bedroom apartment. That's no fun, if you know what I mean. So they all decided to jump out of the window. It was only the fifth floor. "Damn, it's raining cats and dogs again," grumbled a passerby who happened to be passing by.



THE GOD ACADEMY

Once Julie and I bumped into an old storyteller, who immediately told us the following story:

It was the end of the term at the God Academy. The future gods were showing off their inventions of new life forms. Billy Schmuddernicker brought an amusing scaly creature, long and slimy, with big sharp teeth. Arthur Grottenbugger made a grey monster with a long nose and large ears. Stella Schicklgruber uncovered a charming piece with four legs and a disproportionally long neck. Everybody was having fun, laughing at each other's creations, offering bits of constructive criticism and trying to win over Professor Boyzenbaum, their no-nonsense teacher.

"Everyone, have a look at Stella's longneck," Professor was saying. "What a daring piece! Been taking acid again, Schicklgruber?"

Stella scratched her nose.

"Not that there's anything wrong with that, of course. Stimulates imagination and increases prophilazetation, among other things. I myself often..."

Suddenly the door swung open and in stumbled Johnny M.

"Late as usual, Mutterfusser. Come in, and let's see what you've got to show us," said the Professor, and everybody turned their heads towards the poor Johnny.

He put his backpack on the desk and was fiddling with the zipper, feeling uneasy as the centre of everybody's attention.

"It's nothing really, sir. Just a rough draft." He pulled something out and placed it on the desk. Everyone gasped. It looked weird and strangely disturbing. It had almost no hair, two arms, two legs and a head on top of the shoulders. It stood upright, at least when it managed to, and regarded everyone with dumb suspicion.

"It'll be OK. It's just a couple of hours old, you know," explained Johnny apologetically.

"A-ha, Mutterfusser, finishing your project at the last moment, as usual. Tell me, my boy, you weren't looking in the mirror when you thought this one up, were you?"

"No, sir, it is a pure product of my imagination. Just like you taught us."

"Alright then. I'll take your word for it. Well, this is definitely work in progress. Think of maybe adding an arm or a leg, or something. It looks somewhat unfinished as it is."

A sharp cry pierced the air.

"It bit my Flopsy!" yelled Molly Grüberbummer, clutching a hairy yellow creature in her hand. It was gnarling and trying to bite her finger. With her other hand Molly was consoling her own pet project, a furry little critter with long ears.

Ziggy Pfingerstukker tried to retrieve his creation from Molly's fist.

"Sorry, Mol, it's just a bit hungry. I'll give it some cereal. Give it back, Mol, you're gonna break it. I've wasted three months on that."

"Attention, everyone," announced the Professor. "Let's get back to Mutterfusser and his... uhm, whatever you may call it."

"Johnson, sir. Its name is Johnson."

“Excuse me, sir, but I think Johnny’s whatchamacallit is a total rip-off of my Bonzo,” ventured Stanley Brokkenbakker, bringing into everyone’s view his own creation, which apart from being all hairy, indeed showed a marked resemblance to Johnny’s piece.

“But mine is so much smarter than yours!” exclaimed Johnny. “It’s not the appearance, it’s what’s in here,” he tapped himself on the head, “that really counts.”

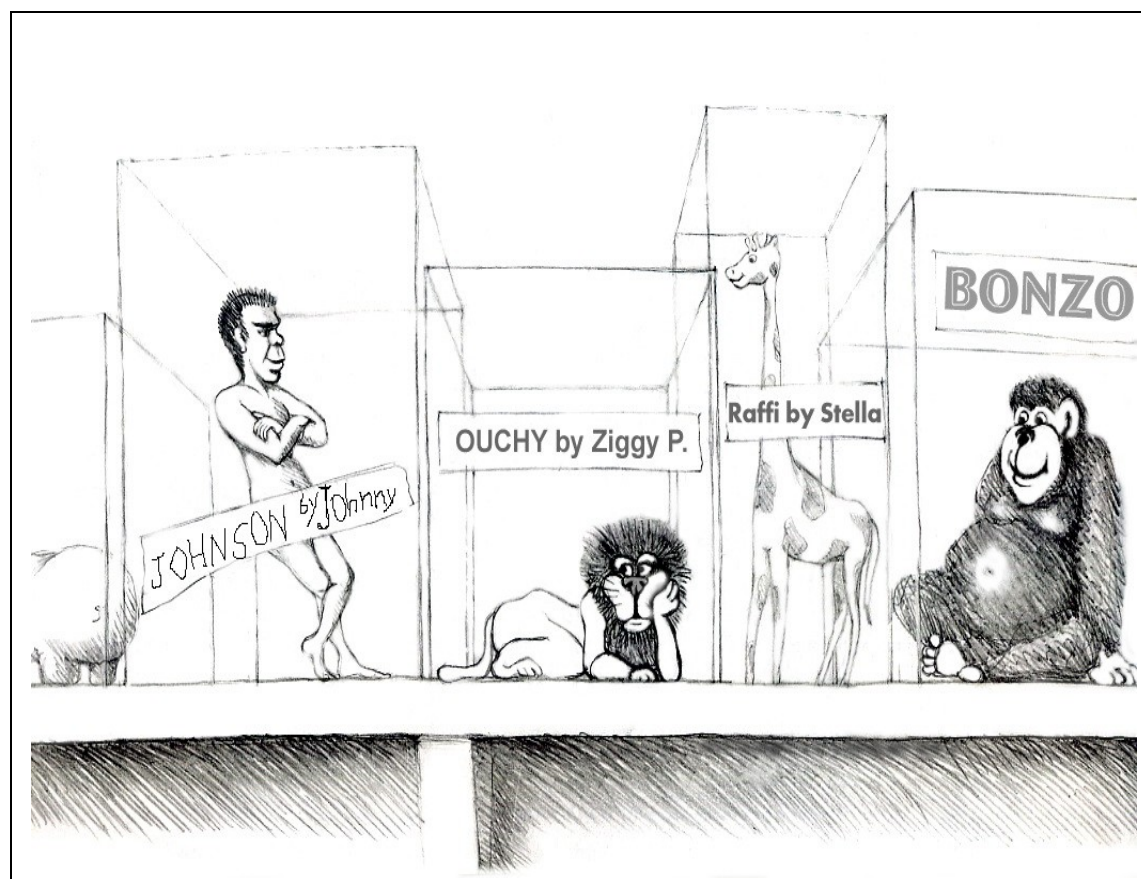
“Calm down, all of you,” ordered Professor Boyzenbaum. “We’ve got no time for petty squabbles. I want you all to put your projects in clear boxes, write your names as well as those of your creations’ on them, and put them on the shelf over there. From what I’ve seen you’ve all done very good, especially you, Sally Überalles. That thing of yours that can actually fly is truly remarkable. By next week please make sure that each of your prototypes has a mate and that they are compatible with each other in order to procreate properly. Then we will populate our new world with them. I’m really looking forward to it. Mutterfusser, can I have a word?”

The Professor took Johnny aside.

“Like I said, John, your piece does need some attention. Or maybe just scrap it altogether and start from scratch, eh? A real god is never afraid to admit a mistake. We want our new world inhabited only by the best creations. They are going to spend millions of years in there, you know.”

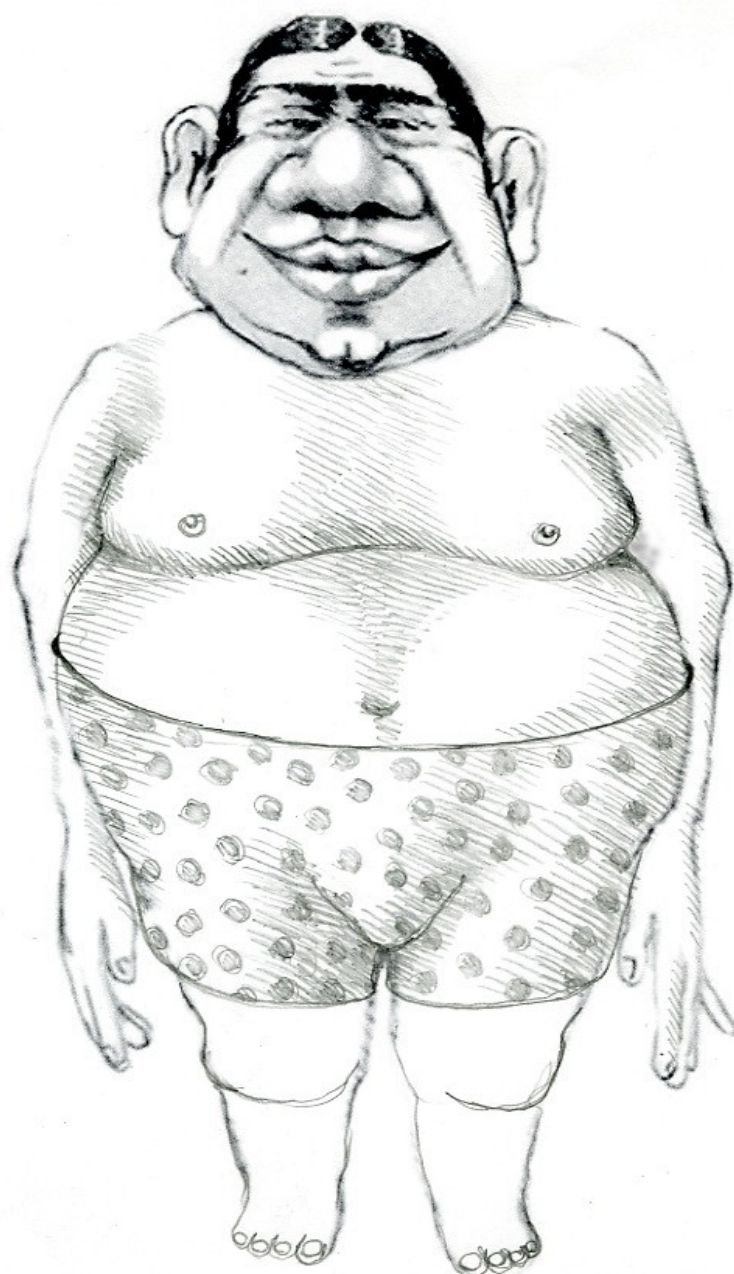
“But sir, with due respect, if I scrap my Johnson, in the new world there will be no Abraham Lincoln, no Mahatma Gandhi, no Nelson Mandela, not even a Bob Geldof. Just think of it!”

“I know, John, it’s bound to be a sad and lonely world. But what the hell! Let’s give it a try anyway, eh?”



THE GOOD GOD TAKES A VACATION

Seeing that everything was hunky-dory, the Good God decided to take a vacation in Honolulu. He thought he deserved it. And damn sure he did.



MARILYN

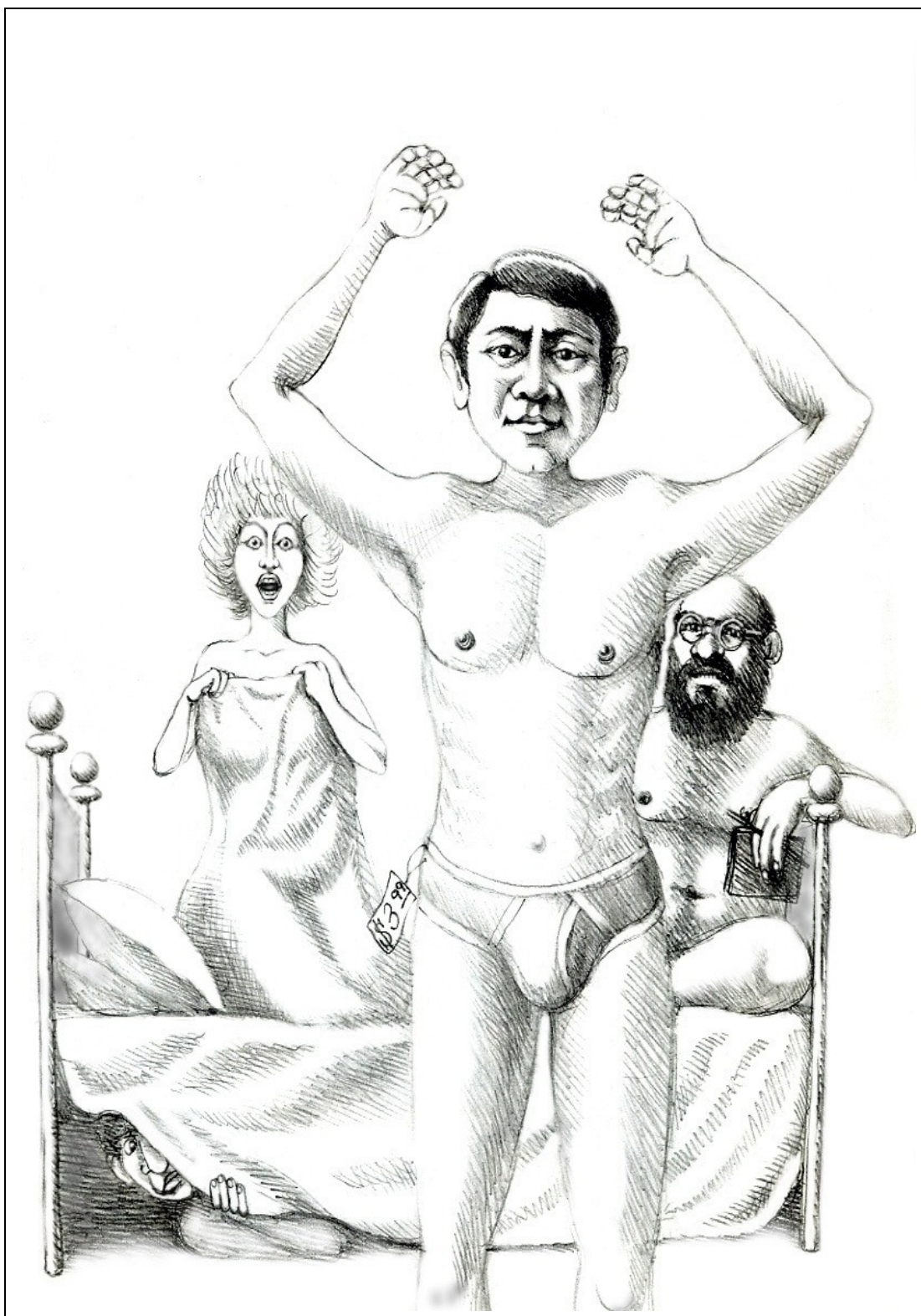
Once Julie was Marilyn Monroe, and I was a humble salesman.

Oh, that one! I love that one!

I knocked on her door and offered to buy my simple wares. She declined but asked if I wanted to get to know her better. I said: “Why, sure,” so she invited me into her bedroom. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that her bed was already occupied. Marilyn introduced us. There was Norman, a middle-aged psychiatrist, as well as Arthur Miller’s little Jewish daddy, but the geezer left soon after. Under the bed there was Joe, a cricket player or something. Rosencrantz the milkman and Guildenstern the postman also showed up, but could not stay as they were on duty. They all turned out to be great guys. Marilyn was great too, but as I was getting to know her better, her hubby Arthur Miller appeared, back from a book signing, or whatever, and started to argue with Marilyn about something, distracting us to no end. Joe under the bed was not happy either, complaining that he could not concentrate. Only the psychiatrist did not seem to mind - he was busy taking notes.

Soon afterwards Arthur Miller published his acclaimed masterpieces: *Death of a Little Jewish Daddy*, *Death of a Psychiatrist*, *Death of a Cricket Player or Something* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

I went to the book signing and asked Mr. Miller what he was working on. He said: “*Death of a Salesman*.” I could have guessed.



A SLIGHTLY DISTURBING STORY

Warning: The following story is slightly disturbing. It may slightly disturb some readers. Some readers may even find it slightly disgusting. If you are an easily disturbed or disgusted type, you may consider skipping it altogether. Sorry for any inconvenience.

It happened during one of the happier periods of our relationship. Julie and I were so happy together. But then she contracted a magic spell of some sort and started turning into a cat. She would turn into a cat and back about twice a week. She'd turn into a cat in the middle of the night, which was annoying enough, but it was even worse when she'd turn into a cat in the broad daylight, on the bus or at the supermarket. People around used to find it slightly disturbing. But I got used to it after a while. Yes, my sweetheart consumed a lot of Purina™ cat food, and our bed was always full of fur, but otherwise it was business as usual. Needless to say, Julie was overflowing with feminine mystique at the time. She had always been somewhat aloof and mysterious, but in her cat period she became totally inscrutable.

You know, Pete, when you are a girl, you've got to create a smokescreen of enigma around you, lest your guy discovers that you are plain as a penny and takes his business elsewhere. But when you are a cat, it comes effortlessly. You are so messed up that messing up everyone else is a piece of cake.

Yeah, I remember how you would scratch me for no apparent reason, or drink up all my soy milk from the fridge, even though I specifically wrote 'For Peter only' on the carton. Or elope with local tomcats and come back two days later all ruffled up.

Sorry about that, Pete, but I was so at one with Nature, you know, that I would yield to every impulse, no matter how questionable. Remember how I wrote 'Canada Sux' with my urine on the Parliament building?

Yeah, and since there was no laws against cats at the time, I as your rightful owner was charged with high treason and disclosure of a state secret. They found me guilty and slapped me with a fine of \$5.75.

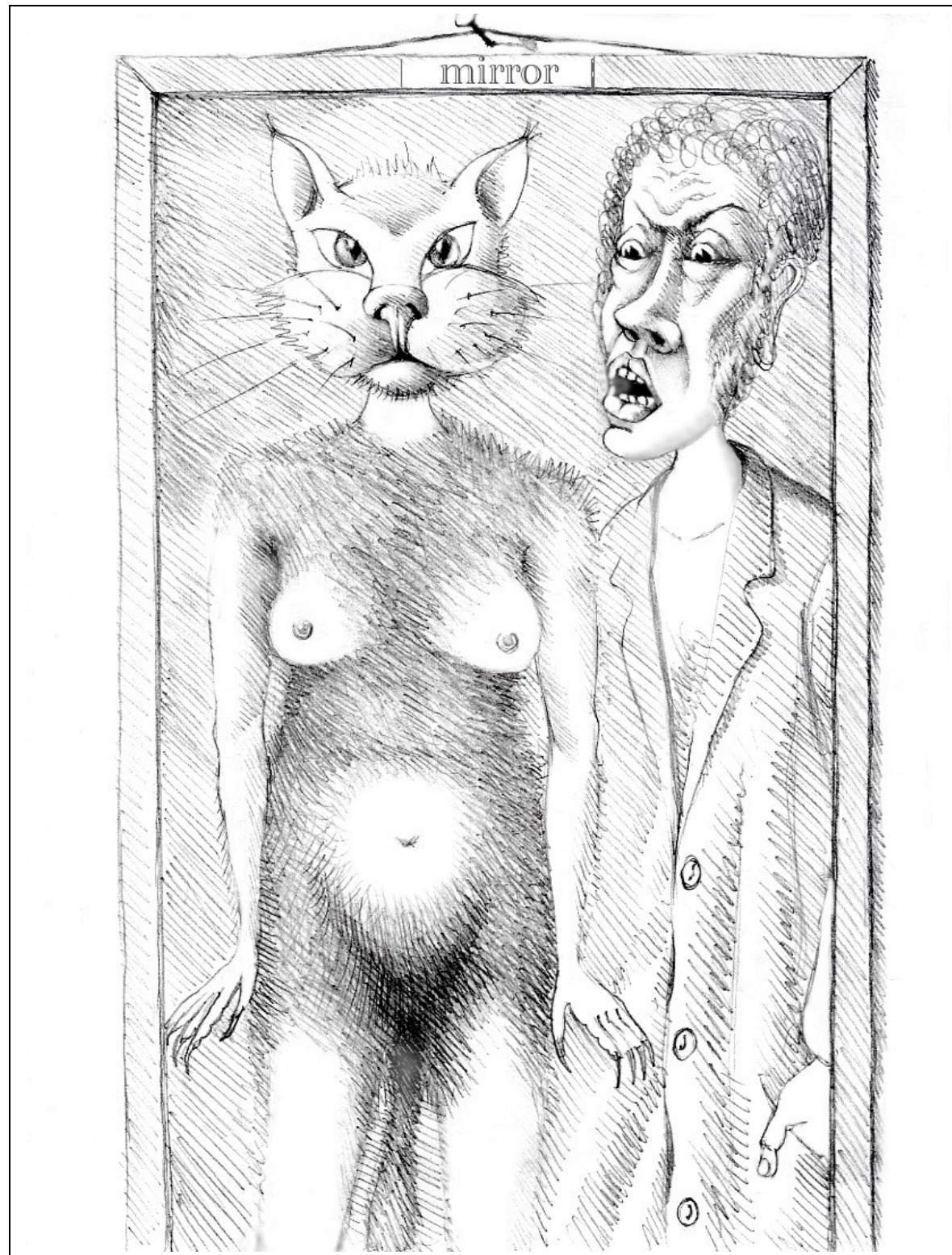
Again, Pete, you should remember that I was guided by the cat mentality, and all cats by default have a very low opinion of Canada.

It's alright, Julie, I don't blame you. It must be wonderful being in complete union with Nature, to pee wherever you feel like, to scratch whenever you get the urge, to be free of all those artificial boundaries the society imposes on us. Although I must admit that the tail was getting in the way, especially during our most intimate moments. But I still felt a bit sad when you stopped switching forms.

Yeah, that was right after Felix, Fritz, Tom, Macavity and Garfield were born. It just stopped happening. So much for the inner mystique.

Now the magic is gone. I can see right through you.

Stop it, Peter, or I'll make a puddle on the carpet.



THE DANCING DAYS

Julie and I used to do a lot of dancing together. I even wrote a poem about it. I don't usually write poetry, except when I need to get into someone's pants, but this time it was different. This time it was genuine.

Rites of Spring, the harvest moon,
Sacred dance of Brigadoon.
Beat goes on and on and on,
I am only dancing, John.

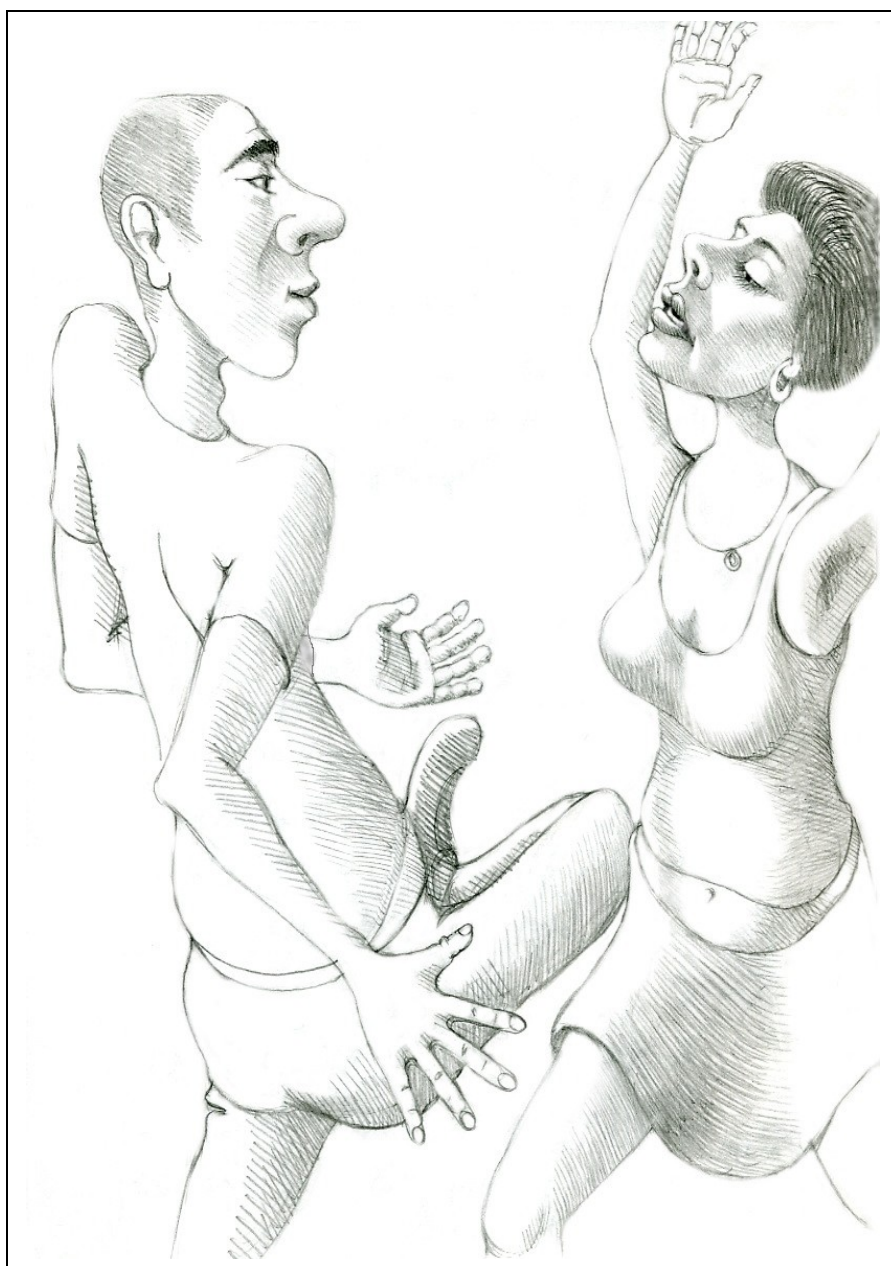
Dance away your broken heart.
Dance away your heating bill.
Life is not meant to be hard.
Not unless you're sick or ill.

Next time you quit, make sure you lock the door.
Last time you didn't – I woke up to find
Four strange chicks in my bed, and six more on the floor.
Saying: "Good morning, sir, hope you don't mind."

I told them I did, and I showed them the door.
They all left in tears, without brushing their teeth.
This type of distraction is hard to ignore.
My true love has gone, so please leave me in peath.

This dancing thing, it was the idea of our marriage councillor. I know we are not married, but we sought his advice anyway. Dancing was supposed to release the tension in our relationship, to pour fresh energy into it. But just like sex before it, it didn't do us any good. We might have just as well taken up water skiing.

What we needed was something meaningful, yet absurd, something eye-opening, yet ear-shuddering, something divine, yet profane, something square, yet somewhat round. Some call it Prostokvosha, some call it Omakoath, some call it doodoowahdoodah. We call it Ding-a-Madonga. But nobody, and I mean *nobody*, knows what the hell it is.

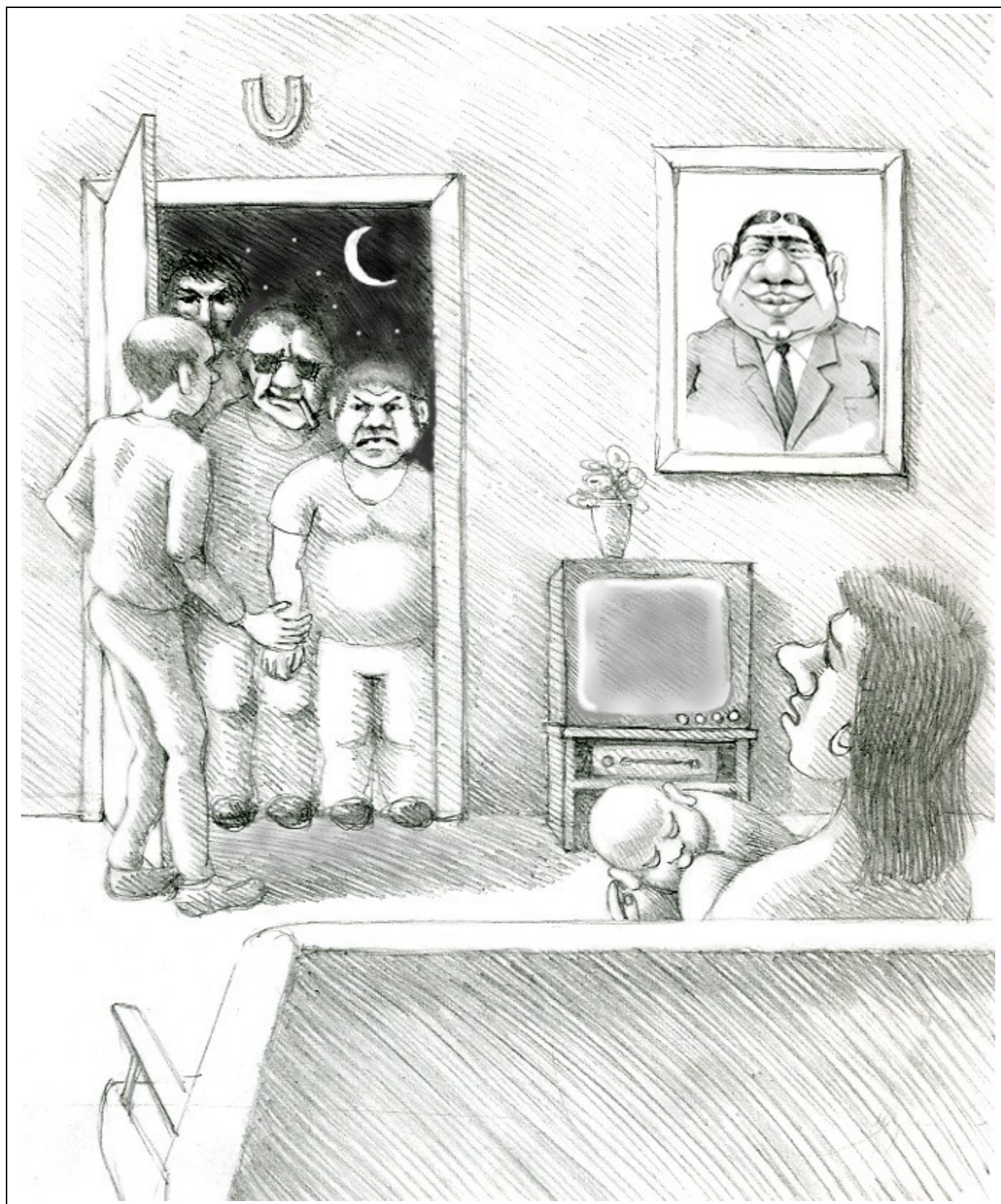


THE GREATEST STORY NEVER TOLD

(not until now, anyway)

That was the wandering monk again, but he swore that this story would be the last one. Ever.

Now, there was this guy Ben, and he lived a long time ago in the Middle East. There were rumours that his real dad was not his mom's husband, but the Good God. But that was just a rumour. On the day he was born his family was visited by three wise guys. Apparently a large shipment of Ecstasy had been left by mistake at Ben's doorstep, and the wise guys were anxious to retrieve it. Unfortunately, Ben's dad had already sold the drug on the black market and spent the money. "Good god," said Ben's dad. "We gotta get outa here. Let's flee to Egypt, or something."



So Ben's family took off in a hurry and fled to Egypt. They were lucky to escape, because at that time the king of the Middle East ordered all male infants circumcised, and that's definitely not something you want to happen to your child. As for Egypt, nobody there cared about circumcision, they were all too busy building pyramids.

When Ben grew up, his family decided it was safe to return to the Middle East. His dad carried on as a carpenter, but Ben was never around to give him a hand. He and his buddy Dick (the monk asked us if we could guess Dick's last name, and I said: "Head?", and the monk said: "You got it!", which made me exclaim: "You are a very silly wondering monk indeed!") always hung about, looking for an easy way to make money. Once they wandered into a temple and saw a rather handsome devil selling raffle tickets.

"What's the prize, Dev?" asked Ben.

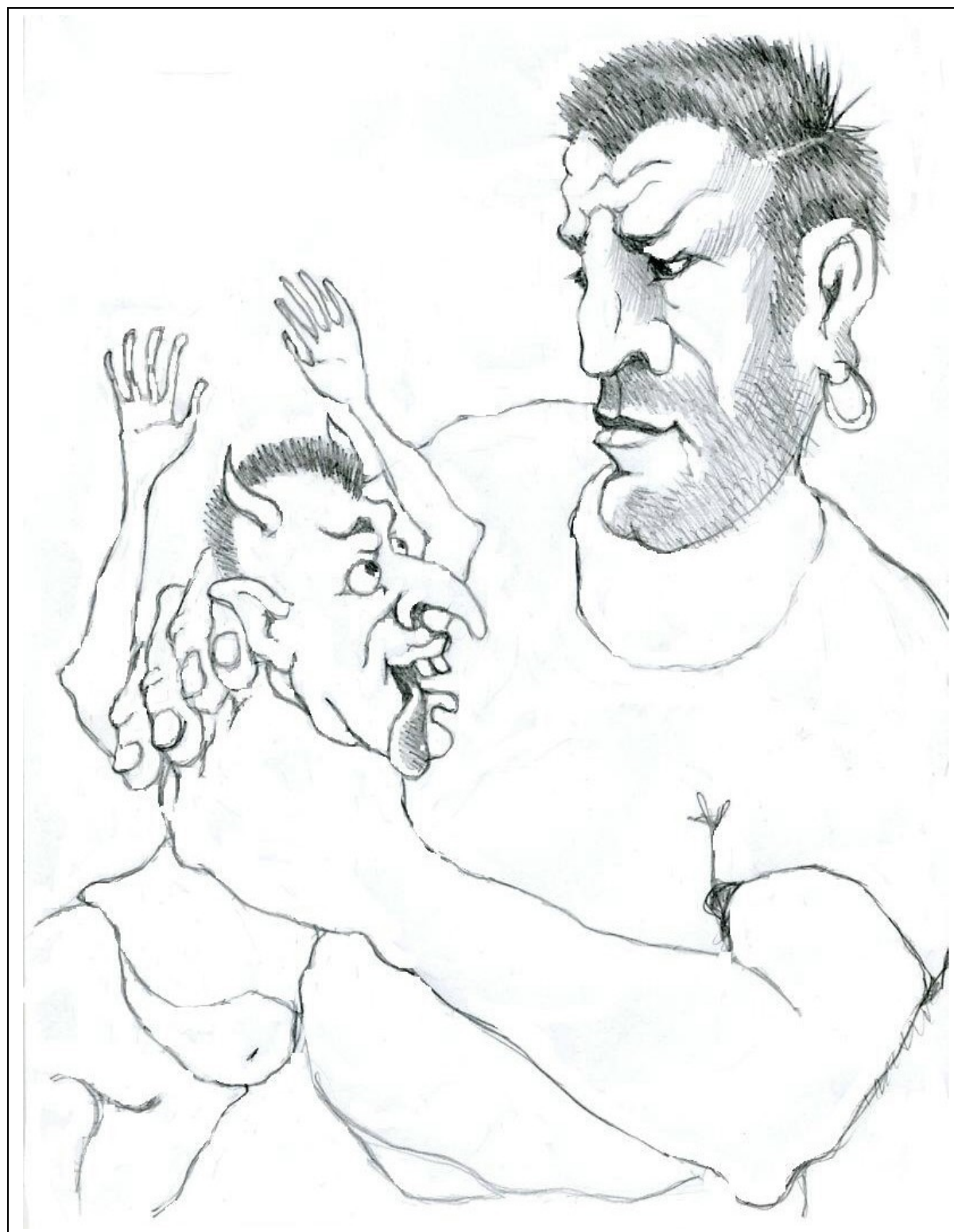
"His Majesty Sheik of Arabia, may Allah bless his soul and grant him a vacation in Acapulco, was generous enough to donate his old harem. Used, of course, but still in a decent shape."

And the Satan made obscene gestures depicting what exactly he meant by 'decent shape'. But Ben did not have any money, and neither did Dick.

"C'mon, Benny, you must buy some tickets. It's for the good cause His Majesty feels very deeply about: a shelter for battered women."

Suddenly Ben got an idea.

"How dare you, damned devil, sell raffle tickets in the Temple of the Good God!" yelled he, overturning the table and kicking the wicked Satan in the seat of his pants.



After the frightened Lucifer ran away, Ben absent-mindedly shoved the book of raffle tickets into his hip pocket. Then he completely forgot about the whole thing, but the next time he put the same pants on, he realized that the pocket was empty.

“Damn, what a shame,” he sighed and went to the local pub for a drink.

At the pub Ben met an old acquaintance, Merle, who bought him a beer.

“So, how’s it going, Benny? Helping your dad in the shop?”

“Nay, it’s too boring. I’m looking for a way to get me a good life with as little effort as possible.”

Now, Merle was a wise man. He just looked like a complete idiot, but that moronic exterior concealed extensive knowledge.

“Well, there is a way, you know, which requires only a bit of an effort, but you’ll eventually get a lot in return.”

“What is it?”

“You could become a messiah, if you wanted.”

“A what?”

“All you’ve got to do is have the Romans crucify you. You die a painful death, but you get reborn in the world of luxury: exotic women, fast cars, mansions all over the world, lots of power. And all your lives afterwards will be like that. Until...”

“Until what?”

“Well, there is an ‘until’, but you don’t need to worry about it now.”

“Cool. But how do I get the Romans to crucify me?”

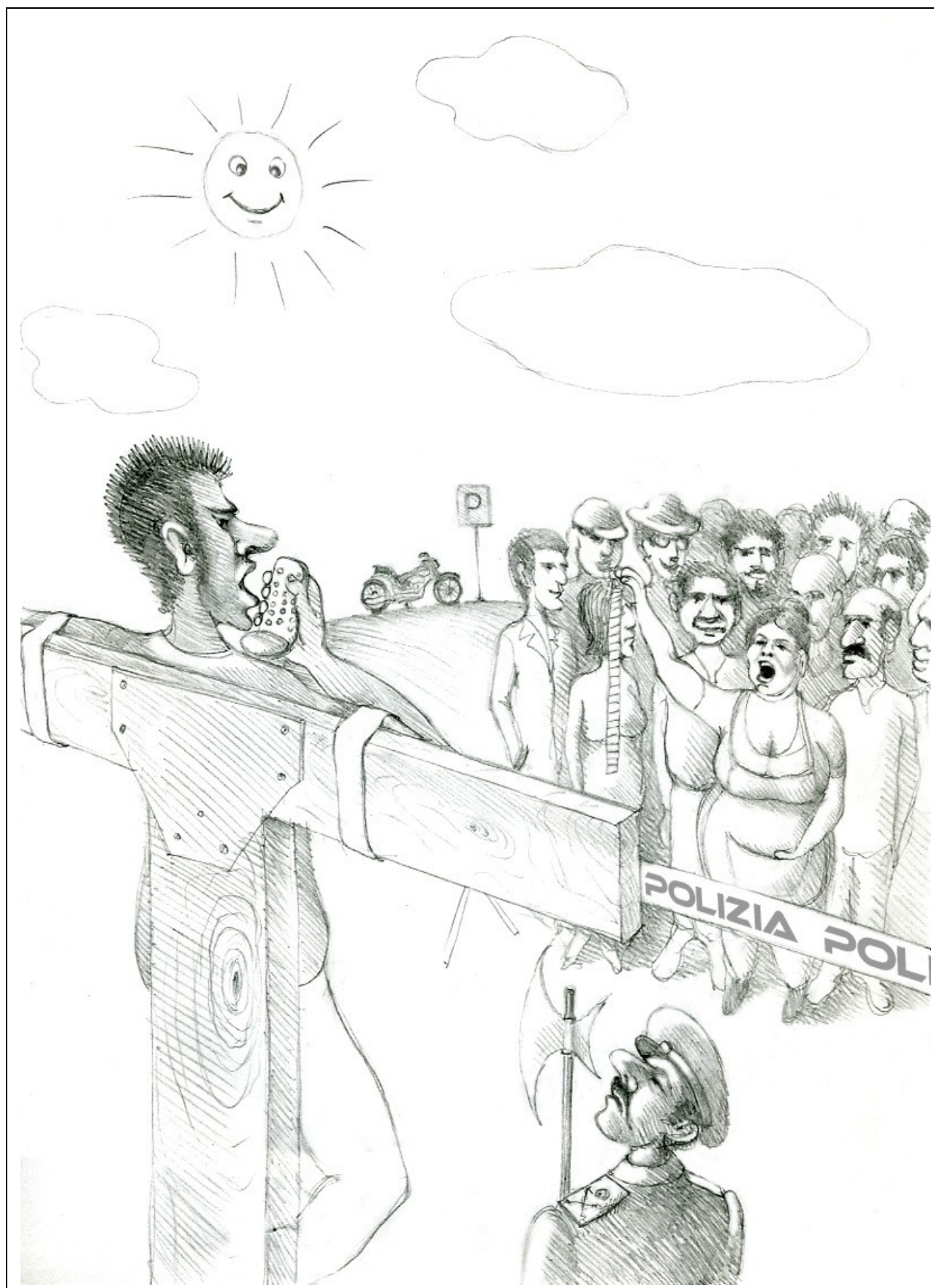
“Oh, that’s easy. They would crucify you for anything. You could call for the end to Russian immigration to the Middle East, or you could boo Bob Dylan at his next live show by the Wailing Wall, or you could pee on the statue of the Caesar in the town square. The last option is probably the easiest.”

Ben did just that, was arrested and brought to the Roman governess, Pontiac Pile-up (thus named because she closely resembled a bunch of Pontiacs smashed into each other) for trial.

“I’m sure you didn’t mean it, Benito. You were just bursting for a pee and didn’t notice it was the Caesar. Happens to me all the time. I know, we haven’t built enough public washrooms in the city. Our fault rather than yours. So I’ll let you go this time. Had you called for the end to Russian immigration to the Middle East, or booed Bob Dylan at his next show at the Wailing Wall, I’d have no choice but crucify you no questions asked. But this is such a minor offence that I’d feel bad if I had your blood on my hands.”

“No, Your Excellence, I did what I did on purpose. I hate your bloody Caesar and all your colonialist empire, and your stupid language, and your ridiculous skirts, and...”

But the governess wasn’t listening. It was already time for her lunch break, so she washed her hands and sat down to lunch. As Bob Dylan wasn’t coming till October, Ben had no choice but to call for the end to Russian immigration to the Middle East. As the Russians naturally demanded that the governess crucify Ben, the poor guy was brought to the Bald Mountain and tied up to the cross.



Then his cell phone rang. The Romans usually didn't allow cell phones on crosses, but this time they forgot to check. Ben answered the phone.

“Oh, hi, Dick. No, I'm not busy, I've got lots of time. What's up? What? 48 is the winning number? It's no use to me now, Dick, I've lost the bloody tickets. Yeah, bummer. See ya 'round.”

But Ben's mom, who was among the crowd of onlookers, yelled out loud:

“No, Benny, you didn't lose the tickets! I put them in my apron pocket when I washed your pants. Here they are.”

Voilà! The honest woman produced the book. And sure enough, number 48 was in it. Now let's take a moment to reflect on the old woman's noble behaviour. What was it that made her speak up instead of waiting a little until her son becomes a god and claiming the prize herself? Was it motherly love? It's certainly possible. Or it might have had something to do with the nature of the prize – the simple woman just couldn't see how she could use a harem. She wasn't that way at all. As we will see below, she merely lacked business sense.

So Ben ordered the guards to untie him, grabbed the winning ticket and hopped on someone's motorcycle, carelessly parked with the key in the ignition. The crowd followed Ben with their eyes – especially the owner of the motorcycle – as he rolled across the desert and disappeared behind the horizon.

Soon Ben became a wealthy man. He put his girls to work – opened an escort agency, the best in the Middle East. He didn't have to do anything – he had everything a man could wish for. True, he never became a messiah, but so what? Others will fill in for him, no doubt.

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QUITEASLOB EXPLAINS EVERYTHING

A disclaimer: All views expressed in the chapter below are those of Quiteaslob, and Quiteaslob alone. The author of this book bears no liability, legal, moral or whatsoever, for any possible damages these views may inflict on the reader of this book, or on their family and friends.

We felt worn-out and on the brink of exhaustion. We had a few gruelling days behind us, and had hardly had any sleep. This morning we decided to take a stroll in the park. I could not help but notice that something that looked like water was dripping from the sky. I know it sounds bizarre, but I swear I'm not making that up.

"Have you seen anything like that before, Lydia?" I asked.

"No, Jean-Paul, never. When I was a little girl, though, I heard my grandma mention something like that. She was saying it was a bad omen. But I thought it was just an old wife's tale."

The old park was wet and smelled of freshly cut grass. Then we saw our friend Quiteaslob again. Only he was not as big as before. He was sitting on a park bench, looking like Bilbo the hobbit and chewing on a cheese sandwich.

"Having fun yet?" he asked with a friendly grin.

"Quiteaslob," I said. "We are totally confused. Not that we were not confused before we embarked on this epic journey of self-discovery, but I must admit we are now even more confused than ever. Not only haven't we discovered anything worth discovering..."

"Speak for yourself, Peter," intervened Julie, giving me a hard look. "I've discovered a lot about us. You, in particular."

Quiteaslob spoke in a quiet reassuring tone.

"You see, the main confusion lies in your perception of the Absolute. The so-called enlightened people of your world tend to seek their way back to the source of creation in order to become one with what they perceive as the Divine. The moment a human being reaches a bit of self-awareness, they start to pack their bags and head back where they came from. To make this journey home is quite possible, but it is also absolutely pointless. You must begin to understand that the Absolute, the Ain Soph, the Ultimate Zero is just that, a *zero*, the starting point, something to run away from rather than go back to. The Absolute, which you may call the God, if you like, is a limitless entity which encompasses All That Is on every plane imaginable. But the problem with It is that being the Whole, It is not capable of doing anything. It cannot interact with anything, It exists in the position of infinite loneliness, because there is nothing beyond It, nothing which is not Itself. It's way too big for Its own good, like the rock star who cannot leave his hotel room out of fear of being mobbed. So what does It do? In Its mind It splits itself into "*an infinite number of gods, individual and equal though diverse, each one supreme and utterly indestructible*", to quote *The Book of the Great Auk*. And these gods, also known as living creatures, start interacting between themselves. This interaction, which we call the Existence, takes part in God's imagination."

"In the beginning you said that we were mere figments."

"Let's look at it from this angle. Picture, if you will, a person stuck inside a trunk with absolutely no room to move. Not a single inch. Can you picture that?"

“Well, yes...”

“Now imagine that this person is immortal and must spend eternity inside the goddamn trunk with absolutely no chance of getting out, ever. The only movement this person is allowed is inside the head. That’s where everything is happening, really. It’s all, as they say, in the mind.

“This is similar to the Hindu concept of *Brahman*, the Supreme Source of Everything, which just don’t give a fuck. Only in fact It does give a fuck, It gives a tremendous fuck, but not in the sense people are accustomed to. Here most likely lies the origin of the Christian notion that no matter how ugly you guys are, God still loves you. That is a bit of an exaggeration, of course, but you can safely say that no matter what, It doesn’t mind you. How can It mind you when all of you happen to be Its own fragments? You can rape your grandmother, eat pork on Saturdays, worship any devil you like, even listen to U2, for all It cares. No moral taboos concern It at all. It could not care less whether you love It or hate It, praise It or denounce It, obey It or compose dirty limericks about It. Least of all It needs you to suck up to It with your silly hymns, It gets no pleasure whatsoever from your kissing Its arse. IT JUST NEEDS YOU TO BE BUSY EXISTING, because the sole reason why It has created Everything There Is is that only by watching you, by *being* you, It can forget its own absoluteness and ultimate pointlessness. It is the most horrifying thing imaginable – this awareness of Its Absolute Completeness, of Its Complete Absoluteness.

“That’s why It plays all these countless endless games in which you guys are unwitting participants.

“Now, as every school kid knows, 'Evil' is a relative thing, as well as 'Good'. Take chess, for instance. There you have white men and black men. It doesn’t mean that the black guys are evil, does it, it’s just that had you had only white guys on the both sides of the board, no game would be possible. If the idea of evil didn't exist, life would be perfect, but Perfection is not a creative condition. Life in Heaven would be intolerably boring, especially given the impossibility of committing suicide and starting all over again. It’s a bit like watching television with nothing but static on. That explains the assumption of imperfection on the part of Perfection. That's why all these minute gods go through this unending chain of incarnations and collect all the life experience along the way. You are indeed perfect, but you pretend to be imperfect for the purpose of the game. There is no such thing as something gone wrong, everything ultimately goes absolutely right, for it is the only way it can ever go. Imperfection constantly strives for perfection, but it can never achieve it, because that would be going back to the source, to the ultimate horror, which totally defeats the purpose of the Creation. The whole thing is not unlike a dog trying to bite its own tail.”

“So what you're saying is that Ding-a-Madonga is not really worth discovering,” I said wearily.

“You can discover it as much as you want, but this discovery will hardly help you with your everyday lives. The Absolute is worthless to you guys. Searching for it, however, is the name of the game. You can't stop reaching for it, because like that carrot for that donkey, it is the only thing that keeps you going. The very idea that one day you may swallow the carrot, reach the Absolute and stop worrying about anything. But you were expelled from Eden for a reason, that reason being that it was intolerably dull up there, at the enormous bosom of the Absolute. You all have been chosen to be part of a big messy adventure. It’s time you understood that.

“OK, I'll give you another example. The development of the mankind can be compared to the infinite fraction.”

“What's that?” asked Julie.

“Say, if you divide 1 by 3, you'll get 0.3... But if you continue to divide 1 by 3, you'll get something like 0.3333333333..., and so forth into the infinity. The longer the fraction, the closer you get to Zero, but at the same time you end up with an infinitely longer number, so in a way you are getting further from the Absolute. The dog can never bite its own tail, and it's not supposed to, as far as the Creator is concerned. Do you like Robin Williamson?”

“We absolutely adore him. Why?”

“There you go.

Death is unreal.
That's the way I feel.
There's more to be revealed.
Lovers and friends meet again and again
On the dear old battlefield.

If you manage to put it better than that, I'll personally give you a tenner.”

“OK, tell us then, what about the Nirvana everybody is trying to achieve? And what about *karma*, if Evil is not real?”

“I'm glad you asked. Karma has nothing to do with evil. Take Steven Seagal, for instance. Everyone knows he's the reincarnation of a major Tibetan lama. The Dalai Lama himself has announced that, and he knows about these things. It means that after living a relatively virtuous life as a lama, Steve got a break and found himself reborn as a major, if rather dimwitted, Hollywood star, which of course is the ultimate Buddhist notion of Nirvana. Nirvana equals Hollywood, in your terms. It is indeed the highest level of existence in your world – no need to do anything, lots of money, and everybody wants to sleep with you. As a monk he abstained from sex all his life only to be reborn as a guy who constantly has lots of... sex! Whoever invented this system must have had a really warped sense of humour. Since his chances of living a virtuous life as Steven Seagal are practically nil – too many temptations – most likely he's gonna be reborn back into a stinky shack in Tibet, if not worse. That's one of the ways karma works. You gain power by self-denial, then you squander it by self-indulgence. It is curious that the Dalai Lama himself recently announced that he's not planning on coming back as Dalai Lama anymore. He says it's up to the people from now on to choose his successor. It may sound absurd, but he makes perfect sense. Now that he has no kingdom of his own, he's got bored with all this monk life, so he decided to follow in the footsteps of the bloke who became Steven Seagal and come back as the next Bruce Willis, or something. And who can blame him? If I were to choose between teaching Buddhism and shagging Demi Moore, I'd go for the young Demi every time.”

“Quiteaslob!”

“No, I'm serious. OK, half-serious, but you get my drift.

“You can say that the ultimate meaning of the Existence is the existence itself, the joy and the pain that comes with it. You need to experience suffering to grasp the concept of joy. If you've never seen darkness, how can you possibly comprehend the concept of light?

“Mr. Crowley was right: Do What Thou Wilt is the only law of the Creation. *Nothing in excess* – but in the end, nothing is prohibited – anything goes. Laws of karma apply, of course – ultimately it doesn't pay to be bad, but it has nothing to do with God's commandments, it's more about the action-reaction dynamics rather than supreme judgement.”

“How's that?”

Quiteaslob glanced at his watch.

“Listen, guys, I'll try to make it as brief as possible, OK? When you kill someone, you take away their energy. Your cannibal tribes know that – they believe that when they eat their enemies, they become as strong and brave as them. You don't actually need to eat anybody, of course – killing or even hurting other people is quite enough. What your cannibals don't realize is that it's only a matter of time before the energy you've appropriated turns from asset to liability. Soon enough your path is crossed by a person looking for exactly this energy. And then you wonder why you are killed in broad daylight by a total stranger. In fact, it is someone acting on behalf of the person you'd killed, or your victim themselves in their next incarnation. Nobody gets away with stealing other people's energy – everyone gets stuck with the bill sooner or later. The history of mankind is the history of the same lumps of energy endlessly changing hands. Your Jesus Christ was a somewhat befuddled character, but he was spot on about turning the other cheek. If someone wants to hurt you, it's wiser not to object – the energy they want from you is most likely the energy you owe them, and you'll be better off without it, even if it means the end of your present life. Eventually people are supposed to learn that crime does not pay, that all the morals aside it is just not beneficial to oneself to harm other people, since one gets to keep nothing that one hasn't earned – and through violence one gains nothing but a valuable lesson. Ultimately, the one and only thing people are able to gain in this world is experience, and that is the point of everything. There's no such thing as a negative experience – often the most tragic events provide the most valuable input.

“So stop worrying about a thing and keep on living and dying, and living again, knowing that nothing can possibly go wrong. And even if it did – you've got trillions of lives ahead of you to right it.”

“So you're saying that Hitler and Stalin are as worthy as Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi?”

“Absolutely. In the end you guys all deserve each other. Of course most people will never accept that, but if you want to know the Truth, you should be open-minded enough to grasp it. Admittedly, this is not kindergarten stuff, but that's the only truth I can offer you. Sorry about that. See ya 'round.”

“Hold on, Quiteaslob, not so fast. You can't drop it like that. We want more revelations.”

“Yeah, more revelations,” echoed Julie.

“Sorry, guys, but I've got a dental appointment in half hour. Alright, then, one more thing. You see, the mankind is presently coming of age. The idea of the Father God, Jehovah, is modelled on everybody's dad, irascible and cranky, but sort of just and benevolent in the end. This idea was crushed in the mid-Twentieth century by Adolf Hitler.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, Hitler had his own motivations for doing what he did, which I’m not prepared to go into right now. But they are not that important to us at this point. What is important is that by committing all his atrocities in the World War II, things that no one in their right mind thought possible, Hitler proved to all the thinking people that God as such did not exist. I mean, Nietzsche had proclaimed that God was dead a few decades earlier, but the old codger was kinda jumping the gun. Admittedly, God was already one foot in the grave, thanks to Darwin and his fellow scientists, but someone had to pull the trigger. By savagely killing millions of human beings, including six million of God’s chosen people, Hitler proved to anybody with a brain that God was no longer around. And even if he were alive, who needs a daddy like that? A good father may punish you when you are being naughty, spank you a bit, send you to bed without supper, or whatever, but ultimately he is expected to protect you from perish, to prevent the sky from suddenly dropping on your head. A father who is worth his cufflinks will not sit idly watching his children being fried in ovens, assuring them that he loves them very much. If all those terrible things happened, as indeed they did, that proves beyond any reasonable doubt that the Father God either never existed or had kicked the bucket. Now, the Holocaust denial is illegal in all civilized countries, in other words the enlightened Humanity strictly forbids spreading false rumours that God might have accidentally survived. I personally find this very touching. Hitler might have failed to achieve most of his goals, but he succeeded in the most crucial one: the assassination of Jehovah.

“As you may know, during the war a group of Jewish inmates at Auschwitz actually put God on trial and found him guilty. Of what? Of being dead, I would imagine. That’s OK, though. Everybody’s parents die sooner or later. It may be a painful experience for children, but usually they get over it. Of course, it puts the orphaned mankind face to face with a new challenge. Now that your parents are not around anymore, you cannot hide behind their backs, you simply must accept the responsibility for your actions yourselves. You no longer can go to the church or the synagogue every weekend and ask your dad to forgive you for having been bad during the week and to give you a carte blanche to do more naughty stuff, for which you will repent the weekend after. This system has been in operation for thousands of years, but it does not work anymore. Thank Uncle Adi for that.

“Now you can forget about the original sin and all that rubbish that was being used to keep mischievous offspring in check. All this guilt complex is perfectly normal for children, but you are not ones any longer. Kids are cute, but sooner or later one has to grow up. Now you guys are old enough to be told the truth about where children come from, so to speak. You don’t owe your parents a thing, you are fully grown human beings who are capable of taking full responsibility for your actions. The fear of this world, which is typically experienced by children who are too young to comprehend what’s going on around them, is to be replaced by the total understanding of who you are, what you are doing here, and how this reality really works. No more bedtime stories of Heaven and Hell for you guys, you are not children anymore, not even teenagers, you are young adults, fully capable of finding your own way in the world. The more you develop, the less violence you employ to solve your problems. Violence and cruelty are essentially kids’ things. Your brains are old enough now to be able to come up with peaceful solutions. Everything will never be perfect, Absolute will never be reached, the infinite fraction will go on forever, but things will get better as you progress. More creativity and less stupidity, that’s for

sure. You grow a bit wiser with every lifetime you spend on this planet. Bugger me, I'm beginning to sound like Deepak freaking Chopra. You guys have outgrown religion, I don't mean you two personally, but the brightest specimens of your race..."

"We are, incidentally, the brightest specimens of human race."

"Oh, are you? Good for you, then. In this case you'll have no trouble understanding what I mean. All that Bible drivel must be insulting to your intelligence, but you've got nothing to replace it with. Atheism fails to answer any important questions, agnosticism is just a temporary state of awaiting answers. It's about time a new Bible was written, a non-religious testament of some sort. The original Bible was meant for children, but as you might have noticed, it hardly has any pictures in it. A bit of a shame, eh? Why don't you guys create a new Bible as a picture book for adults? Write it down, find a good illustrator, and there you are. You'll be grinning all the way to the bank."

"So this is the ultimate truth then, innit?"

"This is the ultimate truth for this particular stage of your development as a human race. As soon as you guys reach the next stage, in a few thousand years or so, enriched by experiences of hundreds of new lifetimes, you will discover new aspects of this game that are hidden from you today. And so on. You will never be able to put a finger on it and say: "There! I finally grasped the ultimate truth!" The quest is always on. Happy trails, amigos!"

THE END

And so our bedtime story had come to its well-deserved end. Outside the night was still, crickets were chirping and a skyful of stars was hanging over the earth. In the distance we could hear the ocean rustle and a few insomniac seals having a row. I tucked Julie in and kissed her on the forehead. It felt like we had reached the end of a long and tiresome journey. Suddenly the phone rang. I picked it up.

"Oh, no, please, you promised! Do you wandering monks have any concept of, like, moderation?"

Anyways, here are the final words of wisdom as related to us by the goddamn wandering son of a bitch:

**One cannot stop a waterfall from falling.
One cannot prevent people from doing bad things to each other.
One cannot write songs better than Jake Thackray.
Impossible. There's nothing we can do.
But that's OK, my baby, that's OK.
Tomorrow's gonna be another day.
Tonight I will be lying in your arms.
Kissing that spot between your breasts
I like to kiss so much.
We'll be in touch,
Oh yes,
We'll be in touch.**

Amen.

